The BOY SCOUTS at the PANAMA CANAL

LIEUT. HOWARD PAYSON

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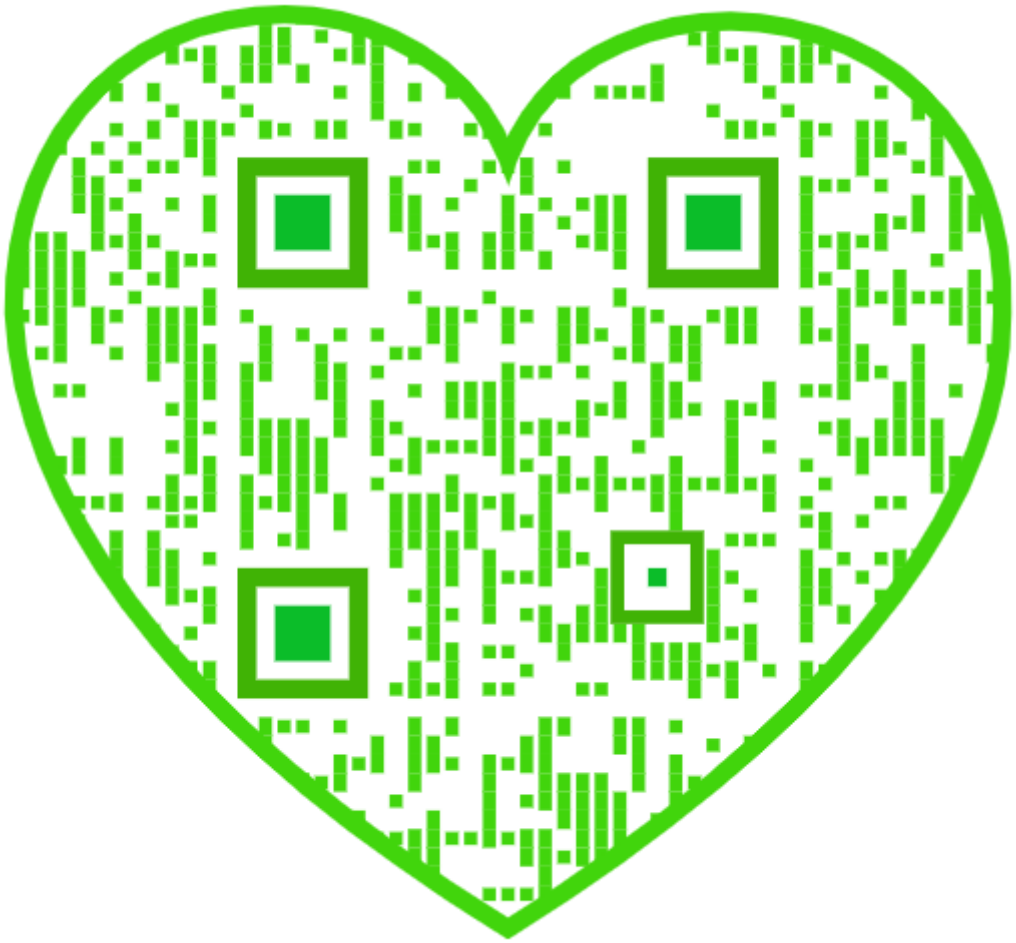

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All the time the trail kept getting fresher.
(Page 266) *(The Boy Scouts at the Panama Canal)*

THE BOY SCOUTS AT THE PANAMA CANAL

By LIEUT. HOWARD PAYSON

AUTHOR OF

"The Boy Scouts of the Eagle Patrol," "The Boy Scouts on the Range," "The Boy Scouts and the Army Airship," "The Boy Scouts' Mountain Camp," "The Boy Scouts for Uncle Sam," etc."

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The Boy Scouts at the Panama Canal

CHAPTER I.

BOY SCOUTS TO THE RESCUE.

Farmer Hiram Applegate had just finished breakfast. For this reason, perhaps, he felt exceptionally good-humored. Even the news he had read in his morning paper (of the day before) to the effect that his pet abomination and aversion, The Boy Scouts, had held a successful and popular review in New York and received personal commendation from the President failed to shake his equanimity.

Outside the farmhouse the spring sun shone bright and warm. The air was crisp, and odorous with the scent of apple blossoms. Robins twit-

tered cheerily, hens clucked and now and then a blue bird flashed among the orchard trees.

As Hiram stepped out on his "vendetta," as he called his verandah—or, to use the old-fashioned word and the better one, "porch"—he was joined by a rather heavy-set youth with small, shifty eyes and a sallow skin which gave the impression of languishing for soap and water. A suit of loud pattern, new yellow boots with "nobby" toes, and a gaudy necktie did not add to young Jared Applegate's general appearance.

"Pop," he began, after a glance at the old man's crabbed and wrinkled features, just then aglow with self-satisfaction, "Pop, how about that money I spoke about ?"

Old Applegate stared at his offspring from under his heavy, iron-gray brows.

"A fine time to be askin' fer money!" he snorted indignantly, "you just back frum Panamy—under a cloud, too, and yet you start a pesterin' me fer money as ef it grew on trees."

AT THE PANAMA CANAL f

"What d'ye want it fer, hey?" he went on after a pause. "More Bye Scut nonsense?"

Jared shook his head as if denying some discreditable imputation.

"I've had nothing to do with the Boy Scouts since the day I was kicked out of—that is, since I left the Black Wolf troop in New York."

"Dum glad of it, though you never tole me what you quit for," muttered the old man.

"But to get back to that money," said Jared; "as I told you when I got back from the Isthmus, I need it. Need it bad, too, or I wouldn't ask you."

"Makes no diff'rence. What d'ye want it fer, —hey ?" he repeated, coming back to his original question.

Jared decided that there was nothing for it but to tell the

truth.

"To go over what I told you the other night once more, I'm in debt. Debts I ran up on the Isthmus," was the rejoinder. "A chap can't live down there for nothing you know, and—"

"By heck! You got a dern good salary as Mr. Mainwaring's sec'ty, didn't yer, an' a chance ter learn engin-e-ring thrun in. You git fired fer misbehavin' yerself an' then yer come down on the old man fer money. I ain't goin' ter stand it, I ain't, and that's flat!"

The old man knocked the ashes out of his half-smoked pipe with unnecessary violence. Jared, eying him askance, saw that his father was working himself up into what Jared termed " a tantrum." Taking another tack, he resumed.

"Sho, pop! It ain't as if you weren't going to get it back. And there'll be interest at six per cent., too."

This was touching old Applegate on a tender point. If rumor in and about Hampton spoke correctly, the old man had made most of his large fortune, not so much by farming, but by running, at ruinous rates, a sort of private bank.

"Wa'al," he said, his hard, rugged old face softening the least bit, "uv course you've tole me all that; but what you h'aint tole me is, how yer

a goin' ter git ther money back,— an' the interest."

He looked cunningly at his son as he spoke. Jared hesitated an instant before he replied. Then he said boldly enough:—

"I can't tell you just what the business enterprise is that I expect to go into shortly. I'm— I'm under a sort of promise not to, you see. But if everything goes right, I'll be worth a good round sum before long."

"Promises ain't security," retorted the old man warily. "I— Gee Whitakers ! Thar's that spotted hawg out agin !"

Across the dusty road the animal in question was passing as the farmer's eyes fell on it. In the center of the track it paused and began rooting about, grunting contentedly at its liberty.

At the same moment a humming sound, almost like the drone of a big bumble bee, came out of the distance. As he heard the peculiar drone, a quick glance of recognition flashed across old Applegate's face.

"It's that pesky Mainwaring gal an' her 'lectric auto!" he exploded vehemently. "That makes the third time in ther last two weeks that Jake's bin out when she come along. Ther fust time she knocked him over, ther second time she knocked him over, an' now—"

A smart-looking little electric runabout, driven by a pretty young girl in motoring costume, whizzed round the corner.

The ill-fated Jake looked up from his rooting as the car came dashing on. Possibly the recollection of those other two narrow escapes was upon him. At any rate, with a scared grunt and an angry squeal, he whisked his stump of a curly tail in the air and dashed for the picket fence in front of the Apple-gate place.

But either Jake was too slow, or the electric was too fast. Just as the girl gave the steering wheel of the auto a quick twist to avoid the pig, one of the forewheels struck the luckless Jake "astern," as sailors would say.

With an agonized wail Jake sailed through the

air a few feet and then, alighting on his feet, galloped off unhurt but squealing as if he had been mortally injured.

"Goodness," exclaimed the girl alarmedly, and then, "gracious!"

The quick twist of the wheel had caused the car to give a jump and a skid and land in the ditch, where it came to a standstill. Farmer Applegate, rage tinting his face the color of a boiled beet, came storming down the path.

"This is the time I got yer, hey?" he shouted at the alarmed occupant of the auto. "That makes three times you run over Jake. You got away them other times, but I got yer nailed now. Kaint git yer car out uv ther ditch, hey ? Wa'al, it'll stay

thar till yer pay up."

"I'm — I'm dreadfully sorry," stammered the girl, "really I had no intention of hurting—er— Jake. In fact, he doesn't seem to be hurt at all."

There appeared to be good reason for such a supposition. Jake, at the moment, was engaged

in combat over a pile of corn fodder with several

of his fellows.

"Humph! Prob'ly hurt internal," grunted the farmer. "Anyhow, it's time you bubblists was taught a lesson."

"Oh, of course I'm willing to pay," cried the girl, and out came a dainty hand-bag. "Er—how much will satisfy Jake's — I mean your—feelings?"

The old farmer was quick to catch the note of amusement in the girl's voice.

"You won't mend matters by bein' sassy," he growled; "besides, your pop fired my boy down on the Isthmus an' I ain't feelin' none too good toward yer."

"I have nothing to do with my father's affairs," said the girl coldly, noting out of the corner of her eye Jared's figure slinking around the side of the porch; "how much do you

want to help me get my car out of the ditch, for that's really what it amounts to, you know ?"

Ignoring the quiet sarcasm in her voice, old Applegate's face took on its crafty expression.

"Wa'al, it's three times now you've run over Jake. Say five dollars each time, — that ud be yer fine for overspeedin', anyhow,—that makes it fifteen dollars."

"Fifteen dollars!" The girl's voice showed her amazement at such a figure.

"It ort'er be twenty," snorted old Applegate; "thar's ther injury to Jake's feelin's. You bang over him at sixty mile an hour an' scare him out'n all his fat an' six months' growth. Fifteen dollars is cheap, an'—you don't go till yer pay up, neither."

"Why, it's simply extortion. I'll pay no such sum. Send your bill to my father. He'll settle it. And now help me out of this ditch, if you please."

"Now, don't you git het up, miss. Thar's a speed law on Long Island, an' by heck, you pay er I'll hev yer up afore the justice. Lucindy!" he raised his voice in a call for his wife; Jared had

vanished. A slovenly-looking woman, wiping her hands on a gingham apron, appeared on the porch.

"Lucindy, how many miles an hour? Jake's bin run over agin," he added suggestively.

"Wa'al," said Lucindy judicially, "it looked like sixty; but I reckin h'it warn't more'n twenty-five."

"Humph!" snorted Applegate triumphantly, "an' ther speed limit's fifteen."

"Why, I wasn't going more than ten miles!" cried the girl, flushing with indignation.

"Huh! Tell that to ther justice. I'll git my son to push yer machine out'n ther ditch an' then I'll hop in aside yer an* we'll drive into town."

"You'll do no such thing! Why, the idea! Take your hand off my car at once, or—oh, dear ! What shall I do ?" she broke off despairingly.

"You'll drive me inter town or pay fifteen dollars, that's what you'll do," declared Farmer Applegate stubbornly; "now then —hullo, what in ther name uv early pertaties is this a-comin' ?"

Around the same corner from which the auto had appeared with such embarrassing results to its pretty young driver came three well-built lads. One of them was rather fat and his round, good-natured face was streaming with

perspiration from the long "hike" on which they had been. But his companions looked trained to the minute, brown-faced, lithe-limbed, radiating health and strength from their khaki-clad forms. All three wore the same kind of uniform, gaiters, knickerbockers, coats of military cut and broad-brimmed campaign hats. In addition, each carried a staff.

"Hullo, what's all this, Rob?" cried one of them as they came into full view of the strange scene, — the ditched auto, the flushed, embarrassed yet indignant girl, and the truculent farmer.

"Consarn it all, it's them pesky Boy Scouts from Hampton," exclaimed Farmer Applegate disgustedly, as, in answer to the girl's appealing look, the three youths stepped up, their hands lifted in the scout salute and their hats raised.

CHAPTER II.

AN ANGRY FARMER.

"Can we be of any assistance?" asked Rob Blake of the girl, whose alarmed looks made it evident that she was in an unpleasant situation. He ignored the red-faced, angry farmer, but took note out of the corner of his eye of Jared, who was peeping out at them from behind a shed. Apparently he had no wish to appear on the scene while his late employer's daughter was there. To himself he muttered:—

"'It's that stuck-up Roy Blake, that butter-firkin, Tubby Hopkins and that sissy, Merritt Crawford. They're always butting in when they're not wanted."

The girl turned gratefully to the newcomers. Rob's firm voice and capable appearance made her feel, as did no less her scrutiny of his companions, that here were friends in need.

"Oh, thank you so much!" she cried. "I am Lucy Mainwaring, and you, I'm sure, are Rob Blake, leader of the Eagle Patrol. I've heard lots about you from my brother Fred, who is leader of the Black Wolf Patrol, First New York Troop."

"Yes, I'm Rob Blake, this is Merritt Crawford, my second in command, and this is Tub—I mean Robert Hopkins."

"I know all on yer," growled out old Apple-gate, "an' I tell yer to keep out of this. Just 'cause yer a banker's son, young Blake, don't give you no right ter come interferin' where yer not wanted."

"Oh, but they are wanted!" cried the girl, before Rob could say a word. "This man says that I ran over one of his pigs. Why, it's absurd. I only just bumped the animal, axid there he is over there now fighting for his breakfast." r

Her eyes fairly bubbled merriment as Jake's raucous squeals rose belligerently from the neighborhood of the hog pens. Tubby spoke up.

"If he can eat, he's all right," announced the stout youth with his customary solemnity.

"But I've grazed the wretched pig twice before," cried the girl, "and Mr. Applegate wants fifteen dollars or he won't help me out of this ditch."

"That's right," confirmed the farmer, "fifteen dollars er she goes afore the justice fer—fer running over Jake."

"But she didn't run over him," retorted Rob, "and anyhow, fifteen dollars is an outrageous price to ask for your real or fancied injuries."

"The hog's injuries," corrected the farmer.

"Same thing almost," whispered Merritt to Tubby with a chuckle.

"Come on, boys/' said Rob, "let's help this young lady out of the ditch."

The girl turned on the power and the three Boy Scouts shoved with all their might at the rear of the machine. It quivered, started, stopped, and then fairly dashed up on to the road. So quickly had it all been done that before the farmer could

make a move the runabout was on the thoroughfare.

"Lucindy! Lucindy, let Towser loose!" yelled the old man as soon as he had recovered his senses.

The woman ran off the porch and in a few seconds a big, savage-looking bull dog came bounding out, showing his red fangs and white teeth.

The girl gave a little scream as the dog looked tip at his master, apparently waiting an order to rush at the boys.

"Go on!" Rob said to the girl in a quick, low whisper, "we'll be all right."

"Oh, but I can't! You've helped me "

"That was our duty as Scouts. Now turn on your power and get away. We'll find a way to deal with the old man, never fear."

Seeing that it was useless to remain, the girl applied the power once more and the machine shot out of sight.

"Consarn you pesky brats," roared old Apple-gate, fairly beside himself.

"Sic 'em, Towse!" he shouted the next instant.

Rob had been prepared for some such move as this. As the dog, with a savage growl, sprang forward, he brought his staff into play. There was a flash of the implement, a quick

twist, and the astonished Towser found himself spinning backward in the direction from which he had advanced.

"Don't set that dog on us again," cried Rob, in a clear, commanding voice, "if you do, he'll get hurt."

"Consarn you!" bellowed the farmer again, "air you aidin' and abettin' lawless acts ?"

"As far as that goes, your hog had no business in the middle of the road," was the quiet rejoinder.

"I'll go to law about this," shouted the farmer furiously, brandishing his knotted fist. But he made no attempt to "sic" Towser on the boys again. As for that redoubtable animal, he stood

by his master, his tail between his legs. To use the vernacular, he appeared to be wondering "what had struck him."

As there was nothing to be gained by remaining, the three Boy Scouts started off anew on the last stage of their "hike/' which had been one of twenty-four miles started the day before to visit a patrol in a distant town on the island. They struck off briskly, as boys will when home is almost in sight and appetites are keen. The farmer, seeing that nothing was to be gained by abusing them any further, contented himself by calling them "young varmints" and turned back toward his

house.

The boys had not proceeded many paces when -they heard behind them the quick "chug-chug" of a motor cycle. Turning, they saw coming toward them a youth of about Rob's age, mounted on a red motor cycle which, from the noise it made, appeared to be of high power. As he drew alongside them they noticed that he, too, was in Scout uniform, and that from the handle

bars on his machine fluttered a flag with a black wolf's head on it. The newcomer stopped his machine, nimbly alighted and gave the Scout salute, which the boys returned.

"My name is Fred Mainwaring of the Black Wolf Patrol of the First New York Troop," he announced, "have you seen anything of a young lady driving an electric runabout ?"

The boys exchanged amused glances. Then Rob recounted the scene in front of the farmhouse. He also introduced himself and his patrol mates. Fred Mainwaring, a fine-looking, curly-haired lad, appeared much diverted.

"That's just like sis," he exclaimed, "she's always getting in trouble with that auto of hers; doing things she aut-n't to, so to speak. Excuse the pun. It's a bad habit of mine. She went for a spin this morning and wouldn't wait for me, so now behold me in chase of her."

After some more chat, during which Fred Mainwaring received a hearty invitation to visit the quarters of the Eagle Patrol in Hampton, the

boys parted, very well pleased with each other. The young scouts of the Eagle Patrol already knew much about the Mainwaring family, Mr. Mainwaring having recently purchased an estate just out of Hampton. The newcomer to the community was preceded by an almost world-wide reputation, as a skillful engineer. Many of the great problems in connection with Uncle Sam's "Big Ditch" had been successfully solved by him, and, although just now he was at home on a "furlough," he was shortly to leave once more for the Zone.

During the course of their brief chat Fred had informed the boys that he and his sister were to accompany their father on the return voyage, Fred taking the position of secretary.

"He had another chap before he came up from the tropics," he informed the boys. "I guess he lives somewhere round here. Jared Applegate his name was. Had to fire him, though, for some sort of crooked work. I don't know just what it was; but it must have been something pretty bad.

for dad got mighty angry when he told about it. You see, in a way I feel responsible. Jared, who was working as a stenographer and typewriter in New York, belonged to my troop. I liked him after a fashion, and got dad to make him

his secretary. It wasn't till after he'd left for Panama that I accidentally found out that Jared, who had been treasurer of the troop, had been stealing small sums from time to time.

M I didn't notify dad for fear of worrying him; but of course Jared was dropped from the troop. When dad got back from the Isthmus this time I asked about Jared and found out that he had been discharged. Just what for, I don't know. Dad wouldn't tell me."

"We know something of Jared's reputation about here," rejoined Rob. "It's none too good. By the way, that's his father's place back there where your sister had all the trouble."

"I knew that his home was somewhere near Hampton," was the rejoinder.

This conversation took place on the roadside

not more than a few feet from a stone wall which bounded the outlying fields of the Applegate property. Behind this wall, if the four lads had known it, was concealed a listener to whom all their conversation was perfectly plain. Jared had watched the boys meeting from the dooryard and had crept cautiously along behind the stone wall till he arrived at a spot opposite that at which the group was chatting. "Listeners never hear good of themselves," says the old saw. Jared assuredly proved its truth that fine spring morning.

An evil look passed over his countenance as he crouched behind the wall. His sallow face grew a pasty yellow, with anger. His shifty eyes glittered furiously as he heard his record discussed.

"So that's the game, is it?" he muttered to himself, as the boys parted company, Fred Main-waring shooting off like a red streak on his machine. "Well, I guess that before long I'll have my innings, and when I do I'll make it hot for all of you, especially old man Mainwaring. I'll get

even with him if it take? me a year; but I don't think it'll be that long."

He drew a letter from his pocket and glanced over it in the manner of one already familiar with a missive's contents, but who wishes, by a fresh perusal, to satisfy himself once more. This is •what he read from the much-creased document:

"If you have what you claim we will talk business with you. It will be made worth your while."

The letter bore no signature nor address. It referred to a subject with which the writer, for an excellent reason, would not have cared to have his name linked. The "big ditch" project, the greatest of the age, perhaps of all time, had, inconceivable as it may seem, bitter and unscrupulous enemies. The person who had written that note to poor, sneaking Jared Applegate was one of these.

CHAPTER III.

ON A MISSION.

While the three Boy Scouts are trudging back toward Hampton, we will take the opportunity to introduce them more fully to our readers who may not have met them before. Rob Blake, the son of the local banker in the seashore village of Hampton, Long Island, had, some time before the present story opens, founded the Eagle Patrol. The early days of its existence formed the basis of the first book of the series, for the lads flocked eagerly to its standard, and the Patrol was soon in a flourishing condition, with a well-equipped room above the local bank building, a fine, up-to-date structure. The adventures of the Patrol in camp and Scout life in general were various and exciting. The boys made some enemies, as was natural, for many boys wished to belong to their Patrol who could not be admitted; but in the end,

thanks mainly to their Scout training, all things came out well for the Eagles.

In the second volume we found "The Boy Scouts on the Range." In this book full details of Scout principles as put into practice in a wild and lawless country were related. The pursuit of Silver Tip, the giant grizzly, popularly supposed to bear a charmed life, was an interesting feature of their experience in the West. Indians and cattle rustlers made

trouble for the boys and their friends, but, although the boys were several times placed in jeopardy and danger, they emerged with credit from all their dilemmas.

Still following the lads' fortunes, we found them in the third volume of the series, "The Boy Scouts and the Army Airship," deeply interested in the subject of aerial navigation. They managed to give material aid in certain experiments that the government carried on at a lonely house on the sea coast near Hampton, and became involved in some thrilling incidents which still further put to the test their ability and cleverness.

In "The Boy Scouts' Mountain Camp," the scene shifted to the Adirondacks, whither the boys went, primarily on a quiet camping trip. But they became involved in an exciting search for a long missing treasure, immured in an ancient and almost inaccessible cave in the heart of a wild region. How they won out against apparently insurmountable obstacles makes exciting and instructive reading.

"The Boy Scouts for Uncle Sam," the fifth volume, related some surprising events that occurred when the boys' aid was called into requisition in connection with a new type of submarine which foreign powers were doing their best to appropriate, but which was intended for the United States Government. Readers of that volume will readily recall Rob's abduction and marooning on a desert island and the pernicious activities of a green motor boat which was used

by the agents of a foreign power. Rob's marvelous swim across a narrow inlet, through which the tide boiled like a mill race, and the inter-

change of Scout signals with astonishing results, are only two of the incidents that go to show that the Eagle Patrol was always to be relied upon to do its duty and live up to the strict letter of the inspiring motto, "Be Prepared."

For the next few days the lads of the Eagle Patrol were busy indeed with preparations for what was to them a very important piece of work. This was nothing more nor less than the placarding of the town with announcements that a team made up of the Eagles would play the Hampton nine in the first baseball game of the season, the proceeds to be equally divided. The Boy Scouts' half, of course, would go toward the general patrol fund for the purchase of equipment and so on.

Each of the lads had a duty to perform in this connection. Hiram Nelson, whose father was in the printing business, was to get up the posters, which were to be printed on big, yellow sheets. Andy Bowles, whose uncle conducted a livery

stable, arranged for rigs to convey the young bill-posters around the country; while Tubby Hopkins,—since the duty was partly of a culinary nature,—undertook to make the paste. This, despite unkind remarks to the effect that, unable

to restrain his appetite, he might be tempted to eat it! In this manner the different duties were distributed and each member of the patrol took an active part in the work.

Rather to Rob's surprise, and likewise to the astonishment of the other lads, Jared Applegate's name appeared as pitcher for the Hampton team. But, after all, there was nothing so very astonishing in this, for Jared, before he left for New York, had been a clever pitcher on the Hampton Academy team, which had beaten some of the best ball players on Long Island. Sam Lamb, the regular pitcher for the Hamptons, it was later learned, had sprained his wrist in jumping on a moving train, and Jared had eagerly volunteered to take his place. He had made open boasts about

the town that he meant to "knock some of those

tin soldier kids higher than so many kites."

"Let him do his best," was all Rob had said, when Andy Bowles, the diminutive bugler of the Eagles, brought him this information.

When not engaged in preparations for "billing" the surrounding country, which occupied almost all the time they could spare from their studies, the Scouts practiced hard and faithfully. They had a good team, but they had to admit that the town boys, too, played very good ball. As the day for the

contest, a Saturday, drew near, excitement began to run high. Jared never spoke to any of the Scouts, all of whom, by this time, knew of his disgrace while a member of the Black Wolf Patrol. Possibly he did not wish to run a chance of being snubbed; but be that as it may, when he passed any of the uniformed youngsters he kept his eyes on the ground. This did not prevent him, however, from hanging around when the Scouts were at practice and

making all sorts of contemptuous remarks concerning their play.

The Saturday before the game, the lads started out in different directions to put up their bills. Those whose duties lay within easy distance of Hampton went on foot ; but the others took rigs. Among the latter were Rob, Merritt and Tubby Hopkins. With them they carried a good thick bundle of bills, plenty of paste and long-handled brushes. It was a beautiful day and they were in high spirits as they drove along the pleasant country roads.

Their way took them by Farmer Applegate's place.

"Let's plaster up a few on the old grouch's barn," suggested Merritt with a laugh.

"No; I don't want to do that," declared Rob positively, "although he isn't entitled to much consideration. It was a shame the way he treated Fred Mainwaring's sister."

"Such a pretty girl, too," chuckled Tubby, with a mischievous look at Merritt. Rob intercepted

the glance and turned red, at which both his companions teased him more than ever. Luckily for Rob's peace of mind, however, at this juncture something occurred to cause the current of Tubby's thoughts to flow in another direction.

Beyond the farm buildings a spotted pig was nosing about contentedly in the middle of the road. As his eyes lighted on the porker, Tubby gave a shout of delight.

"We can use him," he cried delightedly.

"There you go again. Always thinking about something to eat," snorted Merritt.

"Not this time," retorted Tubby indignantly; "anyhow, I've never heard of your being absent at meal times. But on this occasion it's alive and in his proper person that Jake is going to be useful to us."

"In what way?" asked Rob.

"As a living advertisement," chuckled the stout youth, his round cheeks shaking as he eyed the unsuspecting Jake.

CHAPTER IV.

SOME UP-TO-DATE ADVERTISING.

By the time the buggy drew up alongside Jake, who was too engrossed in his rooting operations to perceive it, or at any rate to bestow any attention upon it, Tubby had disclosed his plan to his chums, who hailed it with shouts of delight. From his pockets the fat boy produced an apple and a bit of cake. Tubby never traveled far without provisions. "Keeping in touch with his base of supplies," he called it.

It spoke volumes for his enthusiastic belief in the success of his plan that he was willing to offer both of these to Jake as soon as he had alighted from the buggy. Close behind him came Rob and Merritt, the latter with the horse's hitching rope in his hand.

"Come, pig! pig! pig! Nice Jake!" warbled [Tubby in the most dulcet voice he could assume.

Jake looked up. His small eyes twinkled. Unsuspectingly he sniffed the air as he perceived a rosy apple temptingly held out toward him.

"It's a shame," laughed Rob, half contritely, "if he hadn't caused a lot of trouble for a mighty nice girl I wouldn't stand for it."

"Pig! pig! pig!" chortled Tubby persuasively.

"Unk! unk! unk!" grunted Jake, wiggling his tail.

"Wonderful how they understand each other, isn't it?"

remarked Merritt with a grin. But Tubby was too intent on what he had in hand to resent the gross insult.

Closer and closer shuffled Jake, his greedy little eyes on the apple. All at once he appeared to make up his mind in a hurry. He made a dart for the tempting bait.

"Now," yelled Tubby.

Quick as a flash, as soon as he heard the preconcerted signal, Merritt flung the looped hitching rope about the pig's neck. Jake gave a squeal

and wriggled with might and main, but his ears held the rope from slipping off.

"Give him the apple to keep him quiet," suggested Merritt, as Jake squealed at the top of his voice.

Tubby proffered the apple and instantly Jake forgot his troubles in devouring it. In the meantime Tubby slipped to the wagon and selected a poster or two and a brush full of paste. Returning, amidst shouts of laughter from his fellow conspirators, he plentifully "shampooed" Jake with paste, and then slapped the gaudy yellow bills on till it appeared as if the astute Jake had enveloped himself in a bright orange overcoat.

"Now cut him loose," ordered Rob, when Tubby, with all the

satisfaction of a true artist, stepped back to view his completed work.

Merritt slipped the noose, and off down the road toward the farm dashed the gaudily decorated Jake, conveying the news to all who might see that on Saturday, April — , there would

be a Grand Baseball Game at Hampton, Boy Scouts of The Eagle Patrol vs. The Hampton Town Nine.

As the boys, shouting and shaking with laughter, watched this truly original bit of advertising gallop off down the road, the one touch needed to complete the picture was filled in. From his dooryard emerged the farmer. The first thing his eyes lighted on was Jake. For one instant he regarded the alarmed animal in wonderment. Then, with a yell, he rushed into the house.

"Ma! ma! Lucindy!" he bellowed at the top of his voice, "Jake's got the yaller fever, er the jaunders, er suthin'. Come on quick! He's comin* down ther road like ther Empire State Express, and as yaller as a bit of corn bread."

At this stage of the proceedings the boys, their sides shaking with laughter, deemed it prudent to emulate the Arabs of the poem and "silently steal away."

Looking back as they drove off they could see Lucindy and her spouse engaged in a mad chase

after the overcoated Jake. Even at that distance the latter's piercing- cries reached their ears with sharp distinctness and added to their merriment. Rob alone seemed a bit remorseful at the huge success of Tubby's novel advertising scheme.

"Applegate's a pretty old man, fellows," he remarked, "and maybe we went a bit too far."

"Well, if his age runs in proportion to his meanness, he'll outlive Methuselah," declared Merritt positively.

The road they followed gradually led into a by-track that joined the muin road they had left with one that traversed the north side of the island. It was sandy, and ett places along its course high banks towered on each side of it. At length they emerged from one of these sunken lanes and found on their right an abandoned farm. Quite close to the roadside stood a big, rattletrap-looking barn. It had once been painted red, but neglect and the weather had caused the paint to shale, off in huge patches, leaving blotches

of bare wood that looked leprous with moss and lichen.

"What do you say if we leave a few souvenirs pasted up there?" said Merritt.

"Well, it wouldn't hurt the looks of the place, anyhow," decided Rob. "I doubt if many people come along this road

anyway; but I guess we might as well get busy."

"Well, you two fellows can do the work this time," declared Tubby, stretching out luxuriously in the rig.

"What are you going to do ?"

"I'm going to drive down the road and hitch up in the shade of that tree and take a nap."

"That's pretty cool!" exclaimed Merritt.

"I know it is, at least it looks so," responded Tubby.

"Seems to me it's up to you to do some work, too," protested Merritt.

"As if I hadn't just done a big job in labeling that pig," replied Tubby, yawning; "it's your turn now."

Seeing that it was useless to try to turn Tubby from his determination to rest, which, next to eating, was his favorite occupation, Rob and Merrit took up their brushes, paste and a roll of bills and set out for the barn. Tubby watched them languidly a minute and then drove off along the sandy track while the other two clambered up a bank.

From the road the barn had appeared quite close; but when they reached the top of the bank they found that, actually, it stood back quite a little distance beyond a strip of grass and

weeds. The boys waded through these almost knee-deep, and finally reached the side of the old barn. They set down their buckets and brushes and unrolled some bills preparatory to pasting them up.

Suddenly Merritt raised a warning finger. Rob instantly divined that his chum enjoined silence.

"Hark!" was the word that Merritt's lips framed rather than spoke.

Inside the barn some one was talking, — several

persons seemingly. After a minute the boys could distinguish words above the low hum of the speakers' voices. Suddenly they caught a name: "Mainwaring."

"I guess maybe we might be interested in this/' whispered Rob.

By a common impulse the two Boy Scouts moved closer to the moldering wall of the old barn.

CHAPTER V. A BIG SURPRISE.

Time and weather had warped the boards of the structure till fair-sized cracks gaped here and there. The boys made for one of these, with the object of peering into the place and getting a glance at its occupants. At first they had thought that these were nothing more than a gang of tramps, but the name

of the engineer, spoken with a foreign accent, had aroused them to a sense that, whoever was in the old barn, a subject was being discussed that might be of interest to their new friends.

Applying their eyes to two cracks in the timbers, they saw that within the barn four persons were seated. One of these they recognized almost instantly as Jared Applegate. By his side sat a youth of about his own age, flashily dressed, with a general air of cheap smartness

about him. The other two occupants of the place were of a different type. One was heavily built and dark in complexion, almost a light coffee color, in fact. His swarthy face was clean shaven and heavily jowled. Seated next to him on an old hay press was a man as dark as he, but more slender and dapper in appearance. Also he was younger, not more than thirty, while his companion was probably in the neighborhood of fifty, although as powerful and vigorous, so far as the boys could judge, as a man of half his years.

"You say that you have duplicates of Main-waring's plans, showing exactly the weakest points of the great dam?" the elder man was asking, just as the boys assumed positions of listening.

Jared nodded. He glanced at the more slender of the two foreigners.

"I guess Mr. Estrada has told you all about that," he said.

"Of course, my dear Alverado," the dapper

little man struck in, "you recollect that I spoke to you of Sefior Applegate's visit to me at Washington."

Rob started. The name Estrada, coupled with a mention of Washington, recalled to his mind something that sent a thrill through him taken in connection with the words of the man addressed as Alverado.

Estrada, — Jose Estrada! That was the name of the ambassador of a South American republic that had several times been mentioned as being opposed to Uncle Sam's plans on the Isthmus. What if —but not wishing to miss a word of what followed, he gave over speculating and applied himself to listening with all his might. Jared gave a short, disagreeable laugh.

"You can just bet I got duplicates of all the plans," he chuckled, "I had an idea that Main-waring was going to fire me on account of— well, of something, and so I went to work and copied off all of his private papers I could. You see, it was common talk on the Isthmus that the place

was alive with spies, and I figured out that anybody who was interested enough to hire spies must be mighty anxious to get at the real plans of the canal, and willing to pay big for them,

too," he added with a greedy look on his face, which for an instant gave him a strong likeness to his father.

RobandMerritt exchanged glances. From even the little that they had heard it was plain enough what was going forward in the barn. There was no doubt now that Jared was bargaining with representatives of a foreign power that had good reason to dislike Uncle Sam; no question but that Mr. Mainwaring's plans, or at least copies of them, were in the hands of an unscrupulous young rascal who was willing to sell them to the highest bidder, without caring for what nefarious purpose they were to be used.

The Boy Scouts' blood fairly boiled as they heard. They had always known Jared to be weak, unprincipled and dishonest, but that he would descend to such rascality as this was almost

beyond belief. Merritt in his anger made a gesture of shaking his fist. It was an unfortunate move. A bit of board on which one of his feet rested gave way with a sharp crack under the sudden shifting of his weight.

Instantly the men in the barn were on the alert.

"What was that?" cried Estrada sharply.

"Nothing. A rat, I guess; old barns like this are full of them/' rejoined Jared, striving to appear at ease, but glancing

nervously about him.

"A rat, bah !" exclaimed Alverado, puffing out his fat jowls till he looked like a huge puff adder. "That was not a rat, amigo, that was a spy. This barn is not as secret a meeting place as you led us to believe."

"Come on, Merritt," whispered Rob, "grab up everything and run for it. They'll be out here in a minute."

Swiftly they gathered up their paste, brushes and bills, and crouching low ran toward what had been a smoke-house. Hardly had they darted

within its dark and odorous interior when tHe conspirators in the barn came rushing out, looking in every direction. In Alverado's hand something glittered in the sunlight. The two Boy Scouts peering out through a knot-hole had no difficulty in recognizing the object, with an unpleasant thrill, as an automatic revolver.

They now saw, too, something that they had been unable to perceive from the back of the barn. This was a big, red touring car drawn up close to the antiquated structure. But they had no time to waste in looking at the car. The movements of the searching party engrossed their attention too deeply.

"Scatter in every direction," they heard Alverado order, "we

must find out if anyone has been here listening, or if our ears deceived us."

There was no doubt but that the search was to be a thorough one. Even the chauffeur of the car, which, the boys noticed in a quick, fleeting glance, bore no number, joined in the search. They

rushed about like a pack of bloodhounds in every direction.

"This is getting pretty warm," whispered Rob; "it's plain those chaps are thoroughly alarmed and don't mean to leave a stone unturned to find

us."

"Oh, that unlucky board!" groaned Merritt remorsefully. "I'm a fine specimen of a Scout to make such a mistake as that,—at such a critical time, too."

"It was unfortunate; but accidents will happen," rejoined Rob quickly. "But it's no use crying over spilt milk."

"What are we going to do ?"

"I'm trying to think."

"Perhaps there is a chance that they will overlook us."

"No danger of that, I'm afraid. From what little I saw of Mister Alverado he appears to be a very painstaking gentleman."

"They're searching the house now."

"Yes, that will take them some time; but you

can depend on it that when they've finished they'll search the outbuildings."

"Yes; and they've left that chauffeur on guard outside, too. Not a chance of our getting out of here."

"Unless there's another door."

"Cracky! Maybe there is. Let's look. But we've got to hurry up. Hark!"

"They're coming out of the house and pointing over here," cried Rob the next instant.

Both boys desperately sought to find some way out of the old smoke-house other than by the door by which they had entered. But no exit offered. Suddenly Rob had an inspiration. The smokehouse was roofed like an inverted V. The roof was covered with shingles. Apparently they were rotten, for in places the light came through. One side of the

roof faced toward the abandoned farmhouse; the other faced back upon some fields. Rob thrust his fist with some violence against the shingles on the side of the smokehouse roof that faced the fields. To his joy the

shingles gave way almost like rotten cardboard.

"Hurrah! We've found a way out," he cried exultingly, although he was careful not to raise his voice much above a whisper. He rapidly enlarged the opening till it was big enough to crawl through. Luckily the search party had paused to examine a corn crib that lay between the smoke-house and the farmhouse, so that the boys had a few seconds' grace.

"Now then, through you go!" breathed Rob as soon as he had pitched out the bills.

Merritt scrambled through with Rob close on his heels. The apex of the roof, of course, screened them from view of the party now approaching the old smoke-house. It was a drop of not more than three feet to the ground, for the walls were low, and Rob had, of necessity, punctured the roof near the eaves.

Ahead of them lay a meadow with a patch of woods beyond. Rank brush and tall weeds intervened. But they had to make a dash of some hundred feet across an open space. Somehow,

just how they never knew, they got across it and plunged into the brush, making for the woods beyond.

At the same instant Alverado and the others entered the smoke-hoase.

CHAPTER VI.

BASEBAU,.

"Of course they guessed how we made our escape, Rob."

Merritt spoke as the two lads lay crouched in the thick brush far removed from harm's way.

"Naturally. The fresh breaks in the roof would show them that. But, beyond that, they are none the wiser as to our identity, of which I am heartily glad."

"I can understand that. You don't like the look of things."

"Merritt," Rob spoke very soberly, laying his hand on the other's arm, "it looks to me as if we've stumbled on a monumental plot against Uncle Sam's canal. I don't know much of politics, but I do know enough to realize that there is a certain South American republic that thinks that the Canal Zone was stolen from her by trickery

and deceit. I'm sorry to say, too, that I've heard that there are interests right here in the States that agree with her—people

who think that the opening of the canal will result in enormous losses to freight, and who would like to see the canal completion delayed at all costs."

"I see. You think that the two dark men were representatives of that republic you mentioned."

"I know one of them was," snapped Rob; "he is its representative at Washington."

"Wow! Say, Rob, this is a big thing we've stumbled upon. We must bring it to the attention of the proper authorities."

"That's our duty as Scouts."

"Of course. But what steps do you propose to take?"

"I don't just know yet. We must see Mr. Mainwaring, of course, first. It will be for him to decide. But—horrors, Merritt!—we've forgotten all about Tubby. He's asleep in the rig. Look, Jared and his friends are piling into the

auto. If they go down that road they are sure to discover him. They may do him some injury."

But the next instant both the anxious lads drew a sigh of relief. Instead of taking the by-road, the auto struck off across lots along a barely perceptible and weed-grown

track. In a few moments it was out of sight and the coast was clear. Then, and not till then, the two Boy Scouts set out to rejoin Tubby. They found that rotund youth blissfully sleeping, while the old nag cropped grass at the roadside. They awakened their stout comrade and soon took the lees of sleep out of his eyes by relating all that had passed within the last hour. Tubby heartily agreed that the first thing to be done was to put Mr. Mainwaring-on his guard.

Naturally there was no more thought of bill posting, and filled with a sense of the duty that lay before them the three Boy Scouts drove rapidly back to Hampton. But there a disappointment awaited them. Mr. Mainwaring had been called away on business. He had gone west and

would not be back for a week or more. So for the present the scene in the barn had to be forgotten, while more immediate matters were attended to. During the ensuing week nothing was seen of Jared, but the Saturday afternoon of the game found him "warming up" on the ball field with the orange and black of the Hampton team on his back.

Rob and Merritt fairly boiled over with indignation as they watched him. But they decided not to say anything to him that might put him on his guard.

"We'll give him all the rope he wants," declared Rob. Later he was bitterly to regret the adoption of this policy.

The grounds began to fill up early. The game aroused widespread interest in that section of Long Island. As the local paper put it, "red-hot ball" was looked for. Enthusiastic young ladies were there by the score, waving flags from the bunches on sale about the field by hawkers. The grand-stand filled early. Rob's team-mates

noticed his eyes frequently straying in that direction.

"Looking for Lucy Mainwaring," whispered Tubby to Merritt with a grin on his round and blooming countenance.

Finally the game was called and soon both teams were on the field. Hiram, captain of the Eagles, won the toss and chose to go to bat first. The game was started. Nelson promptly struck out. He could not help making a wry face as he threw down the willow.

A broad grin was on Jared's face. He went through all sorts of antics, as Andy Bowles came to bat with a look of grim determination on his face.

Jared was good; that was a fact which admitted no blinking, as the Eagles had to acknowledge. Andy was given first base on balls, tried to steal second, was thrown out and retired disgruntled to the bench. The Hampton rooters began to give their war cry. The Eagle supporters replied to it bravely. It was early in

the game to be making any predictions. Rob was third batter. He struck out. Jared's delight was ill-concealed.

"I'll shut 'em out," he bragged loudly, not caring who heard. "I'll show the tin soldiers some pitching."

The Eagle supporters had tc admit that things did not look very roseate, but they consoled themselves by recollecting the fact that practically the game had only begun.

Hampton now went to the bat. Merritt occupied the pitcher's box. He had injured his arm somewhat in practice, but it was agreed, after a consultation, to put him up as first pitcher, holding Rob in reserve till they got the Hampton's gait. Merritt showed wonderful form. In one, two, three order he struck out Hampton's batters, including Jared.

Great was the delight of the Eagles and their, friends.

"Good boy, Merritt ! Good for you ! Kr-e-e- e-ee-ee!" was heard on all sides as the Hamptons

came running out to take their positions in the field.

Merritt felt a glow of pleasure as Rob congratulated him.

"I hope I can keep it up/' was all he said.

"I hope so, too; but I'd like to have a chance at Jared," responded Rob.

The Eagles now came to the bat, Rob leading. Rob was not only a good pitcher but a sure batter. Whiz-z came Jared's ball. Rob met it and promptly drove a humming liner into right field. It was a safe base hit.

"Oh, you Eagles!" chanted the crowd ; those of them who were not lined up for Hampton, that is.

Rob watched his chance and stole second, to the huge delight of his team supporters. An ugly look was on Jared's face. The next batter, Merritt, received first base on four balls. Cheers and yells greeted this. Jared's countenance grew blacker and blacker. He bit his lip impatiently.

Suddenly Rob played dangerously off second base. The Hampton second baseman was close to

him. It was a daring move. Jared saw it in a flash. The catcher's signal came. He threw the ball to the Hampton short stop on second base.

But Jared's chagrin at the way his pitching was being "knocked about" unsteadied his aim. He threw wild. The ball passed above the short stop's outstretched finger tips. Rob darted off for third base like a jack rabbit.

The right fielder got the ball and shot it to third base, but, although the ball and Rob seemed to arrive simultaneously, Rob was hugging the bag contentedly in the nick of time. This

was a quick, stirring bit of play and brought yells from the crowd, among whom criticisms of Jared were freely expressed. He grew pale with rage and chagrin.

Paul Perkins now came to bat. The dreamy lad struck out. His apparent unconcern made the crowd laugh. They laughed even more when Tubby, having struck out also, calmly picked up * bit of pie he had been munching when he came

to bat and marched to his seat contentedly chewing it.

At this stage of the game two were out, Merritt was on second and Rob on third.

Now came the turn of Ernest Thompson, a big-eyed, serious-looking lad, one of the first recruits to the Eagle standard and a first-class scout. Jared was now on the broad grin. Thompson looked easy.

"Look out, baby-face," chuckled Jared, poising himself.

An in-curve shot from his hand. Ernest gazed at it in an uninterested manner and allowed it to goby.

"Strike one!" came the sonorous voice of the umpire, who was Sim Giles, the postmaster.

"Oh-h-h-h-h!" yelled the crowd.

The next ball was of the same character. This time Ernest

struck at the ball. He missed and the crowd yelled again. Jared began to regain self-confidence.

"Strike two," was the cry.

The third ball was high.

"Ball one," declared Sim.

Then came an out-curve. But it was too far out. Jared was a rather ragged pitcher.

"Ball two," called Sim.

Suddenly Jared threw to third base. But, quick as he was, he didn't catch Rob off.

"How's that?" yelled Higgins, the Hampton third baseman, as he touched Rob.

The umpire merely waved his hand in what he deemed a professional manner.

"A thousand years late," chuckled Rob to Higgins.

Jared heard him and flashed him an ugly look. Hatred gleamed in his eyes. Rob watched him narrowly and again stole off third.

Bang!—came a swift straight ball at the dreamy Ernest. But

he was not in "a trance," as Jared had scornfully thought. Crack!—went a hot grounder to short stop. Merritt stood fast at second, but Rob, like an arrow from a bow, shot off for home. The short stop fired in the

sphere to the catcher as quickly as he could. But before the ball got there, Rob, his legs working like pistons, had passed the home plate.

What a roar went up then! Flags waved and cheers resounded among the Eagle sympathizers.

As the cheering died away the catcher, Hollis Powers, walked into the diamond to confer with Jared, who showed by his passionate gestures that he was mad clear through.

"Look out or they'll knock you out of the box," yelled some one.

This did not tend to improve Jared's temper. But, nevertheless, he struck out the next batter, Simon Jeffords, which helped in part to restore his balance. The Eagles then retired to the field.

"How do you feel, Merritt ?" was eagerly asked by his comrades before he took the pitchers box.

"All right, so far. You'll know soon enough when my wing gets sore," was the reply.

Apparently Rob was not destined to pitch that day. Merritt struck out the first two batters,

fielded a hot liner and threw out Jared before he got to first base. Jared was certainly piling up his list of grievances against the Boy Scouts. To add to his ill-feeling he had recognized Fred Mainwaring, nodded to the latter and received the cut direct. The fact that Lucy Mainwaring was a witness to this snub did not improve matters.

"Good boy, Merritt!" yelled the Eagle supporters in a frenzy of delight.

The third inning commenced with the Eaglet at the bat. But now Jared appeared to have on his throwing clothes. The Scout batters couldn't hammer his pitching at all.

In fact, all that occurred while they succeeded each other at the bat was a monotonous succession of calls from the umpire:

"Strike one. Strike two. You're out."

The Hampton villagers began to pluck up heart. They gave Jared warm support and cheers for his really excellent work and that of his teammates. To the somewhat blank astonishment of

the Eagles, they had not been able to find Jared's pitching at all in this inning. It began to look as if they were by no means to have things their own way.

CHAPTER VII. A TEST FOR THE EAGLES.

But Jared was to score still further. He came to bat confidently at the end of the third inning. With two of his side out and none on bases, he knocked a beautiful homer into left field. It was a really fine drive. The Hampton contingent went wild. The faces of the Eagle supporters, too, were cheerful, but anxious. As for Jared, he beamed, and then as his eyes met Rob's, he gave the latter a malevolent glance.

At the end of the third inning each side had scored one run. The Eagles made no runs in the following three innings, while Hampton scored two, so that, when the seventh inning began, things looked rather gloomy for the Scouts. The score then stood three to one in favor of Hampton and the town players fairly swelled with confidence.

It was already painfully evident that, exercise his will power as he would, Merritt's arm was getting sore. He had put redoubled efforts into his work but the score showed with how little success. At the beginning of the seventh, he told Captain Hiram that he thought the Hamptons had "found" his pitching, but he consented to stay in the box for one more

inning.

The inning commenced with Merritt at the bat. He was given first base on balls. Paul Perkins made a base hit to left field. He got safely to first with Merritt hugging second. Tubby Hopkins once more struck out with the same cheerful grin on his round countenance. Hiram sent a slow grounder to Jared and was promptly thrown out at first, but Merritt reached third, and Paul second, very nicely.

Rob Blake now came to the bat. Jared determined to strike him out if it were humanly possible. After a lot of posing which he thought gave him quite a professional air, Jared delivered

the best ball in his repertoire, a swift and vicious in-curve. It fairly hissed through the air.

Crack!

Rob's willow collided with the sphere and away it sped far into right field. Merritt and Paul scored amidst tremendous enthusiasm; hats were thrown in the air. Things once more looked rosy for the Eagles. Rob was easily the favorite of the moment.

As for Jared, his feelings were not enviable. He felt that he would gladly have allowed the others to score if he had only

been able to shut Rob out. He struck out the next batter, and then Hampton went to bat.

Merritt's arm felt better and he went to the box without the misgivings that had assailed him earlier. But with the first ball he pitched he knew that he had deluded himself. The batter hit a fly to right field and was caught out. Merritt, summoning every ounce of resolution he could muster, struggled on right manfully. But it was a hopeless cause. Base hits were made with

absurd ease. Jared was caught out on a fly. Finally there were two out and two on bases.

Higgins came to bat and made a second home run amidst yells of delight from the Scouts' opponents.

It began to look like grim defeat for the Scoute. The Hampton contingent was jubilant. Jared danced mockingly about whenever he could catch the eye of a Boy Scout.

The next Hampton batter struck an easy fly to left field which was caught by Paul Perkins. The Scouts now came to the bat, beginning the eighth inning. The score was six to three in Hampton's favor. Things looked black, but with the true Scout spirit the lads of the Eagle put the best face possible on matters. They noted Jared' s leering face without a sign that they saw his malignant triumph.

Jared struck out the first three Scout batters with ridiculous ease. When the Hamptons came to the bat, the Eagles made a change in pitchers. It was Rob, cool, self-confident and determined,

who occupied the box. This followed a consultation at which it was agreed that, splendidly as Merritt had done, his arm had gone back on him.

As Hiram adjusted his catcher's mask and Rob took his new position, things grew very quiet It was palpable to all that the change of pitchers denoted a crisis in the game for the Scouts. Rob faced the first batter without indulging in any of Jared Applegate's antics. Hiram signaled for a swift one. He braced himself as he saw it coming. He knew that Rob was a swift pitcher with a mighty right.

"Strike one!" yelled the umpire a fraction of a second later.

Jared, at the bat, looked angry and puzzled. He wondered why they hadn't put Rob in the box at first. He did not know that Rob, while a splendid pitcher, "was not to be relied on through a long game as was Merritt. Another thing he didn't know was that Rob had determined with a grim resolution to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat, if possible. That's a feeling that will

carry any boy, or man either for that matter, a long way.

Hiram signaled for another cannon-ball. It was plain that those were just the kind of missiles that were not at all to Jared's liking.

The ball shot from Rob's hand apparently without effort. But it shot over the plate like a bullet.

"Strike two!" bellowed the umpire.

"Oh, you Rob!" yelled his friends.

"K-r-ee-ee-ee-ee-ee !" shrilled the Scouts.

But Rob took no notice; nor did he regard Jared's look of hatred, oddly mixed with worry. Rob's pitching bothered him. He wanted no more off that plate.

But whi-z-z-z-z-z-z! came another "cannon ball" like a high powered projectile burning up the atmosphere. Jared swung wildly an inch too high.

"Striker's out!" came the call of Jared's doom from the umpire.

It was a furiously angry youth that strode to the bench.

"Thought you were going to make ducks and drakes out of him, Jared?" grinned one of his fellow players.

"So I was. I was just trying him out/' grunted Jared

disgustedly.

The next two batters couldn't handle Rob's pitching at all. The game began to look as if it might be retrieved after all.

"Blake! Blake! Blake!" chanted the crowd as Rob walked toward the batters' bench.

Merritt was first at bat for the Scouts in the ninth inning. Jared began to pitch with as good an imitation of Rob's speed as he could muster. Merritt let the first ball sing past him.

"Ball one."

The second, also, went by in similar manner.

"Ball two!" sang out Sim in his high, nasal voice.

Jared pulled himself together. He sent the ball humming right over the home plate. Merritt swung at it and made a safe base hit to right field. Then came Hiram. He struck out. Jared

and the Hamptonites began to feel better. Jared was still holding the Scouts down and they had a safe margin of runs.

Paul Perkins struck out this time. Then came Ernest Thompson, who dreamily submitted to the same process.

Rob Blake now came to the bat. His exhibition of pitching just previously earned him a round of applause. Jared looked positively bilious. He had actually been holding himself in reserve for Rob. It was his intention to shut him right out. Rob ignored Jared's first ball.

"Ball one!" was the cry.

"Ball two !" followed in rapid succession. Rob smiled easily. Jared's dislike of the boy at the bat was making him irritable and uneasy.

But he rallied his skill and threw what looked like an easy pitch. Rob struck at it but fanned the empty air.

Jared grinned, the Hamptonites yelled and the umpire called : —

"Strike one!"

"All right for you, Mister Casey at the bat/' snarled Jared, "watch out for this one."

It came like a flash, a tricky, wavy curve. Rob swung with all his strength and—missed!

"Strike two!"

A groan went up from the Scout supporters. Their chances of victory looked slim indeed now.

"Wake up! You're in a trance!" scoffed Jared, grinning at Rob. "Get out of the straw."

"The straw in the red barn!" suddenly flashed Rob, in a low, but far-reaching voice. It was pregnant with meaning and Jared turned white as death. He fumbled the ball with trembling fingers.

"W-w-what do you mean?" he managed to gasp.

"Play ball!" yelled the crowd impatiently.

Jared, his fright still on him, pitched. He made a wild fling. Rob trotted to first base. Merritt boomeranged to second.

Simon Jeffords got his base on balls, advancing Rob to second and Merritt to third. Everybody

began to sit up and take renewed notice. A home run now would add four to the Scout score. Could they get it ? Jared had shown that he could hold them down. Could he still keep up his gait ?

And now out strolled Tubby Hopkins. He paused first to insert a huge chunk of chewing gum in his capacious cheek and then, not noticing in the least the laughter and joking that greeted his appearance, he lounged to his place, his jaws

moving rhythmically.

"It's up to you, Tubby. Bring home the bacon !" some one yelled.

"He's got the bacon with him," shouted some other humorist.

Jared fixed his eyes quizzically on Tubby.

"Like a bottle of anti-fat, kid?" he sneered; and then, "Oh, what I won't do to you! How do you like 'em ?"

Tubby stopped chewing an instant. His large eyes opened wide as if he had just heard Jared's voice.

"Oh, I like 'em Panama fashion, if you've got

any of those about you to-day/' he said with a cherubic smile.

Zang! came the ball. It was as swift as any that Jared had yet thrown. He would have liked to see it knock the disconcerting fat youth on the head. But it did no such thing. With an agility unsuspected except by those who knew him, Tubby swung viciously at the spheroid.

"Bin-go!" yelled the rooters.

Off into left field a hot liner whizzed its way.

"Go on!" shrieked the Eagles and their supporters, dancing

up and down in excitement.

Off darted Merritt from third. He shot across the home plate an instant later and scored amidst loud cheering. Hot after him flashed Rob, with Simon close behind. Excitement rose to a point where it was almost unbearable.

Tubby had shot like a stone from a sling the instant he made his hit. And now more like a steam roller the fat youth cavorted over the bases while the crowd went crazy. Pandemonium reigned.

"Home! Home! Home!" shrieked the raucous crowd in a frenzy.

Boys hugged each other and the Scouts danced up and down.

Tubby, with amazing speed, his short fat legs working like piston rods, flashed by first, second and third bases. The next instant a yell went up that split the air. A rotund form sky-hooted across the home plate and then, tripping up, went rolling like a tub of butter into the arms of Rob and his team-mates. Tubby had made one of the most sensational plays ever seen on the Hampton field, and foes as well as friends generously applauded the fat boy. But he paid no attention to the plaudits.

"Great Scotland! I've lost my gum," were his first words on being helped to his feet. "Anybody got a chew ?"

"A barrel full, if you want them!" yelled the delighted Scouts, dancing about the boy who had hit out a home run with bases full.

The next batter, Walter Lonsdale, struck out

Then the town team went to bat for its last

chance. The score now stood thus:

Eagles: seven. Hamptons: six

Rob resumed his place in the pitcher's box. Higgins struck out. But Jared got his base on balls. Maybe Rob was overconfident. Conners came next. Two strikes had been called on him, when Rob, like a flash, hurled the ball to first. With neatness and expedition Jared was put out.

Incidentally, Conners had been so rattled by Rob's pitching that, when the latter threw to first, Conners frantically struck at an imaginary ball, causing a roar of laughter. This disconcerted him so badly that he missed the next ball and struck out.

The Scouts had indeed snatched victory from the jaws of defeat. The game was theirs but by so narrow a margin that they hardly liked to think about it.

In an instant the crowd broke all boundaries and surged about the victorious Eagles.

"Three cheers for Home-run Tubby!" yelled somebody.

In a flash the fat youth was hoisted on half a dozen shoulders. Then began a triumphal march around the field to the music of Andy Bowles 5 bugle, which he had suddenly produced from some mysterious hiding place.

"You see, I knew that I'd need it," he explained afterward.

Rob, arm in arm with Merritt, brought up the rear of the tumultuous riot of enthusiasts. Suddenly Rob's eye caught sight of a figure in the uniform of the Hampton's players sneaking up behind a corner of the grand-stand which it was evident the crowd must pass in their march of victory. It was Jared Applegate. With him was the same young man the boys had seen in the barn the week before, as well as two other youths of bad character in the village, Hodge Berry and Maxwell Ramsay.

"What mischief is Jared up to?" breathed Rob, clutching Merritt's arm.

"I don't know, but he looks as sneaky as a pole cat. Let's watch him."

The two scouts followed, at a slight distance, the group of which Jared was the center. They saw the boys that they were watching sneak in behind the grand-stand, while Jared stooped and picked up a heavy stone. As the crowd, with

Tubby's rubicund countenance shining above their heads, came swinging around the corner on their way off the ball field, Rob gave a sharp exclamation and sprang forward.

Like a flash he gripped Jared's arm just as it was about to launch the stone at Tubby's head.

"You—you rascal!" he managed to exclaim, forcing Jared's arm down with a firm wrist hold.

The next instant Hodge Berry and Max Ramsay, both of whom had played in the Hampton team, sprang at Rob furiously.

"You're going to get a licking you won't forget in a hurry," they cried.

The crowd had swung on, not noticing the dramatic scene that was occurring so close to

them. Rob dropped Jared's wrist and turned to face his opponents.

Something in his face made them halt an instant, and in that brief space of time Merritt was at his side. The strange youth who had said nothing so far now started to speak, but Rob checked him.

Utterly ignoring the others, he addressed himself to Jared.

"Well, what do you want?" he demanded.

"I want to get square with you," replied Jared in a furious tone. He appeared almost beside himself with rage.

"Humph! and so you've brought a bunch of your amiable friends along to help you in case it proved too big a job to tackle alone."

"See here," exclaimed the stranger, stepping forward a pace, "I don't know who you are except by name, but I'm not going to have you insult me. Jared here is a chum of mine. I knew him in New York "

"Sorry for you," flashed out Rob curtly.

"None of your lip," growled Max Ramsay sullenly; and yet, so electrical had the atmosphere become, and so capable of handling himself did the clean-living young scout look, that, uneven as the odds were, no further hostile move was made.

"Jared said he had a bone to pick with you/' went on the strange youth. "He told us he wanted to have it out with you Scouts. He invited us along. I'm not going to take any part in it, you can be assured of that. There'll be fair play."

"Like stone throwing, for instance," retorted Rob contemptuously.

"I guess you're scared," sneered Jared.

"Who says so?"

"I do. You act so. You're afraid of me."

Jared was quite quick enough to see that Rob was unwilling to get into a fight. The leader of the Eagle Patrol abhorred, above all things, to be mixed up in a disgraceful set-to. But even Rob, who had unusual self-control, was fast beginning to lose patience.

"I don't know what harm I've ever done you,

Jared," he said quietly, "but if you feel so, why I can't help it."

"I hate you, Rob Blake," exclaimed Jared through his clenched teeth, "and I'm going to polish you off once and for all,— do you hear me ?"

"I'm not deaf. Let us pass, please," said Rob, still with that same calm, unruffled manner.

"Not till you've given me satisfaction."

Jared interpreted Rob's manner amiss. He was sure now that Rob would avoid a fistic discussion at all hazards. He determined to show his friends what a terrible person he was.

"Well, you heard what I said," repeated Jared, thrusting out

his jaw and stepping closer to the unmoved Rob, "you've got to give me satisfaction— understand ?"

"Do you want me to fight you?" asked Rob, without the flicker of an eye.

"Yes, I do," whipped out Jared boldly.

At the same instant, thinking to catch Rob ofl? his guard, he aimed a vicious blow at the lad in front of him. Rob merely stepped to one side.

Jared almost lost his balance as his fist encountered thin air, and just saved himself from taking an ignominious tumble.

"So; you're a coward, eh?" cried Jared furiously.

"Possibly that's your opinion," spoke Rob calmly. "I don't like fighting, Jared, it's not gentlemanly and it's not a Scout principle; but if you want fight, you're going to get it!"

"Good for you!" cried Merritt, who had stood silent, well knowing Rob's ability to handle himself, for the Scouts had many friendly sparring bouts with the gloves. The noble art of self-defense was cultivated by all of them, but as a means of self-defense and for the joy of the sport only.

Rob whipped off his coat in a jiffy. Jared, with a slight quiver of his lower lip, did the same. Both boys stood ready to defend themselves, and, while the shouts of the crowd

bearing Tubby aloft died away in the distance, the fight, into which Rob had been unwillingly dragged, began.

CHAPTER VIII. SKIU, VS. MUSCLE).

Jared was heavily built and strong, but his science was nothing to boast of. Jared had never had the application to build himself up physically. Yet he was no mean opponent, as Rob saw. The leader of the Eagles was not as heavily muscled or as weighty as Jared, but he more than made up for it in his cat-like quickness and ability to spar.

The farmer's son saw this and realized that his best opportunity to put a quietus on his hated opponent was to land a heavy blow before Rob's perfect training had a chance to assert itself. He rushed in wildly, determined to battle his way through Rob's defense and beat him down by sheer weight and force.

But in this he had reckoned altogether without his host. Rob cleverly dodged Jared's savage

swings, and, watching his opportunity, countered with amazing swiftness. None of the onlookers saw the blow, but they heard the sharp crack of Rob's knuckles on Jared's jaw. As for Jared, he beheld a swimming galaxy of brilliant constellations.

Rob saw that he was dazed for an instant and dropped his

hands to his side.

"We'll stop right here if you like, Jared," he said.

"Not much you won't," shouted Jared, shaking his head, "I've only begun."

"Well, don't keep on the way you're going," laughed Merritt cheerfully. Jared's friends began to look rather gloomy. In their hearts both Max Ramsay and Hodge Berry felt heartily glad that they hadn't tackled the Boy Scout.

Once more Jared rushed in on Rob. A second later his nose stopped a solid blow straight from the shoulder. It felt to Jared as if he had inadvertently collided with the rock of Gibraltar. !" he yelled in spite of himself.

Then, losing his head completely, he rushed at Rob and seized him in a wrestling grip. Rob, caught off his guard, lost his feet and the two toppled to the ground, going at it in rough-and-tumble fashion.

"Magnificent, but not war!" cried Merritt as he danced about.

Over and over they rolled, Jared managing in this style of battling to get in some heavy blows that caused Rob to gasp. But in a short time Rob had Jared fairly howling for mercy.

"Help!" he bawled out, "take him away, you fellows! He's not fighting fair."

• v Don't be a cry baby," was all the consolation he got from his friends. "Give it to him hard."

Thus counseled, Jared made one last effort to triumph over Rob. He suddenly disengaged himself and jumped to his feet. Rob was up as quick as the other and met Jared's last rush calmly. Jared, by this time, had lost his head utterly. He waved his arms wildly in a whirlwind of blows that Rob contented himself by

ducking and dodging. He had no wish to punish. Jared any more severely.

Suddenly the battle came to an abrupt termination, and that through no effort of Rob's. It had rained the week before, and back of the grandstand was a depression in which water had gathered in sufficient quantity to form a small pond.

His wild evolutions had brought Jared close to the edge of this miniature lake. The ground there was muddy and slippery, and, before he knew what had happened, Jared's feet slipped from under him. He staggered, clutching at the air to save himself; but although his friends rushed forward to help him, they were too late. With a mighty splash the luckless Jared toppled backward into the pond.

He was helped out, a truly pitiable object; but even his friends could not help laughing at him. Plastered with mud and streaming with water, his enraged countenance excited

nothing but mirth.

"Come on," said Max Ramsay as soon as he

could for laughing, "we'll get you to the buggy, Jared, and you can drive out home. Good thing you won't have to go through the village."

"Shake hands, Jared," exclaimed Rob impulsively, for the moment forgetting what they had overheard at the barn, in his sympathy for Jared's plight.

He extended his hand, but Jared dashed it furiously aside.

"I'll get even with you, you—you tin soldier!" he shouted, shaking with rage, and also with the chill of his immersion.

"I'm sorry you feel that way about it," rejoined Rob, as he turned aside and put on his coat, which Merritt had held for him.

"Yes, and you'll be sorrier yet," snarled Jared, as his friends walked him off toward the shed where his buggy was tied.

Just then, from across lots, there came a

summons: tt

Hey, Rob! Where have you got to ?" "I'm coming right along," was Rob's reply; *Vait a second."

He jammed on his cap and stepped out from behind the grandstand. Running toward him was Tubby, who had somehow escaped from his admirers.

"What's up?" cried Rob, as he saw the lad's flushed, excited face.

"Say, you know that note you left for Mr. Mainwaring?"

"Yes."

"Well, he's just got back. He's over in that auto yonder and asked me to find you as soon as possible."

Tubby pointed to the road on the outskirts of the village, where a big torpedo-bodied auto was drawn up. In it was seated a man of past middle age, with iron-gray hair and keen eyes, who was watching the boys closely as they came toward him.

As they drew nearer he got out of the car and addressed the chauffeur.

"You needn't wait for me, Manning. I'll walk home," he said-

AT THE PANAMA CANAL Ml

CHAPTER IX. FIRE;!

"A most remarkable story; but I happen to know certain

things that fit in with it in every way. Boys, you have done me a great service to-day."

Mr. Mainwaring paused as he spoke and looked kindly and admiringly at the three Boy Scouts who had unfolded to him the story of their experiences at the old barn. The tale had been told as they strolled along the road leading to the engineer's home, on a hill outside Hampton.

It had occupied some time in the telling, and dusk was drawing in so that, much against their will, the boys were compelled to decline Mr. Mainwaring's invitation to visit his library and see some interesting drawings and data relating to the Panama Canal. But they made an engagement to come at some other time and hear from

the great engineer about some of the wonders that had been accomplished in the magic land lying nine degrees north of the equator—a land which, so far as the Canal Zone is concerned, has been turned by Uncle Sam's canal commission into a land as healthful as any, if due precautions are observed.

It was almost dark as the boys hastened on their homeward way. There was a meeting called in the Eagle rooms over the bank that night, and they were all three in a hurry to get home and change and eat supper. As they walked along at a brisk pace, the conversation naturally was chiefly concerned with the topic which they had just been discussing with Mr.

Mainwaring.

"I wonder what he'll do about it?" said Mer-ritt.

"Well, as he said, it's a mighty delicate matter as things are now," rejoined Rob. "To make a hasty move might force the plotters to rush things before any precaution could be taken against them. Even to take Jared before the

authorities might be premature, so Mr. Main-waring said. I gathered, in fact, that he means to let matters lie quiet for a time and watch every move of those whom he suspects."

"They ought to clap the whole outfit in jail," sputtered Tubby, "and give them nothing to eat but bread and water."

"The last part of that remark would be a fearful punishment to Tubby, all right," chuckled Merritt, nudging Rob.

"What a lucky chap Fred Mainwaring is," said Rob presently. "Just think, when his father goes back to Panama he's to go, too. His dad says that every American boy who can ought to see the Big Ditch before the water is in it, and that, even if Fred does miss some schooling, he will be getting some education that can't be obtained from books."

"That's the sort I'd like," sighed Tubby, who was a notoriously unwilling worshipper at the shrine of knowledge.

"How about a cook book?' Chuckled Merritt

mischievously, and then dodged aside just in time to avoid a blow from Tubby's chubby fist.

Suddenly, behind them came the sound of wheels and the staccato rattle of a horse's hoofs tapping the road at a rapid trot.

"Out of the road, fellows, here comes a rig," cried Rob.

So fast was it coming that they had hardly time to step aside before the buggy, which held two occupants, was beside them. The driver pulled the horse up almost on its haunches and hailed them as they stood in the dark shadow of some big maples at the side of the road.

"Hey, you fellows! Got the time ? We've got to make that seven-thirty train out of Hampton and my watch is broken."

Rob, and his companions, too, recognized the voice instantly.

"It's just seven o'clock, Jared," said Rob, "you'll have plenty of time."

"Confusion," muttered another voice in the w rig, that of the strange young man who now

appeared to be Jared's shadow. "It's those Boy Scouts."

Jared picked up his whip and aimed a vicious slash into the darkness. It is not likely that he had any hope of striking one

of the lads he disliked so much, but he intended it probably just to show his hatred of them in a graphic manner. The next instant the same whip cracked over the flanks of his horse and the buggy dashed off into the gathering gloom.

"Whew!" whistled Rob, "so Jared is going to beat a retreat, eh ?"

"Looks like it. I saw a suit case strapped on the back of that rig."

"We ought to stop him."

"How? By what right? What excuse could we offer ?"

"That's so; but just the same it looks as if he's going to give Mr. Mainwaring the slip and join those plotters some place."

"It certainly does," admitted Merritt. "*I

S€ THE BOY SCOUTS

guess we ought to call up Mr. Mainwaring and ask him if there is anything we can do."

"That's a good idea, Merritt. At any rate, having done that, we shall have performed our duty."

Hardly had the words left his lips before there came booming out on the night air a sound that thrilled them all to

the heart. Clear and loud, with a note of clamorous terror, there came winging toward them the clang of the fire alarm! Stroke after stroke struck with a heavy hammer on the tire of an old locomotive wheel—that was the only alarm Hampton boasted. The wheel hung outside the fire house of the Vigilant Engine Company Number One. There was no Number Two.

"Gee whiz, fellows! The fire alarm!" cried Tubby, pulling up short in the road.

They stood breathlessly listening, while out on the dusk the clamorous notes of the steel tocsin went clanging and jangling. A thrilling, soul-stirring cry at any time, it was doubly so to these

lads, members of a body enlisted in the cause of helping those who needed aid.

They were standing on the main street at a point where the stores and business houses had given place to residences surrounded by lawns and trees. Out of the houses there came rushing men and women and children, all in high excitement.

"Fire," cried some of the men.

"Where ?" came back in a dozen voices.

But nobody knew accurately. Suddenly a man, hatless and coatless, came sprinting up the street.

"It's the 'cademy!" he was yelling, "the 'cademy's on fire!"

"The Academy!" gasped Rob, aghast at the thought that the private school which most of the boys enrolled as Scouts attended was in flames.

"It's up to us to do something and do it quick!" he cried the next instant. "Merritt, run as quick as you can to Andy's house. Tell him to sound

the Assembly. There's lots of work for the

Eagles to-night."

A boy that Merritt knew was hastening by on a bicycle.

"Lend me your wheel for Scout duty, will you?" asked Merritt breathlessly.

The boy eagerly assented.

"I guess they'll need all the help they can get," he volunteered as Merritt sprinted off up the street, "my pop has been on the 'phone and they say it's a mighty bad blaze."

It seemed an eternity, but in reality it was only a few minutes before Merritt reached Andy's home. The little bugler was just rushing out as Merritt dashed up. They almost collided.

"Sound the assembly!" panted Merritt. "The Academy's on fire."

"Wow! Wait a second. I knew of the fire and was going to get hold of Rob for instructions."

Andy darted back to the house. He was out again in a flash and sounding the sharp, clear

notes of the assembly call. Then came another urgent summons, the quick, imperative "fire call."

"There go the firemen on the run," exclaimed Andy, as several of the Vigilants dashed by the house. "Come on, M«rritt; the others will all beat it to the fire-house at top speed."

"Rob's already there, I guess," panted Merritt as they ran side by side, balancing the bicycle. As they proceeded, Boy Scouts came from some of the houses and joined them.

"The Academy! The Academy's on fire," they shouted.

Against the darkening sky a red gush of flame leaped up suddenly.

"Come on, fellows!" implored Merritt. "It's going up like a pack of fire-works. We've got to hustle if we want to be of any use."

CHAPTER X.

A SCOUT HERO.

At the fire-house they found Rob and Tubby helping to drag out the antiquated apparatus which was the best that Hampton boasted. Glad enough of the aid of the Boy Scouts, the firemen greeted them warmly. They recalled a former occasion when the khaki-clad lads had been of signal service to them.

Accordingly, while some of the men hitched up a pair of bony old nags to the engine, and others got the fire lighted, the hose cart was rushed out and the ropes unraveled.

"Fall in, boys," shouted Rob.

They obeyed his order with military promptitude. The long rope was swiftly seized. Rob was in front, as became the leader of the troop.

"All ready!" came the cry.

"Heave!" shouted Rob.

Like one boy the Eagles bent to the work. Off they scampered down the street, Andy's bugle calling to clear the way. Men and women on their way to the fire scattered to right and left as the hose cart came lumbering along, drawn by its willing young escort at almost as fast a gait as horses

could have dragged it.

"'Ray for the Boy Scouts," shrilled a small boy.

The excited crowd took up the cry as the hose cart went roaring by, speeding toward the sinister glow on the sky ahead of them.

A throng rushed behind it, making believe to aid greatly by pushing the lumbering vehicle.

Suddenly a terrible thought flashed across Rob's mind. The house occupied by the janitor of the school was undergoing extensive repairs and he and his family had been given temporary quarters in some rooms at the top of the school building.

The sudden realization of this sent a thrill

shooting through the boy. What if they were

caught in a fiery trap, unable to escape?

"Oh, I hope they are all right," Rob found himself muttering half aloud as at the head of a line of straining boys he galloped along.

"Hey! Here comes the ingine," went up a sudden shout from the crowd behind.

Glancing back Rob saw the engine, the pride of the Vigilants, coming careening down the street. Its whistle wailed in a melancholy fashion and from its stack there streamed sparks in sufficient volume to render timid folks apprehensive that another fire would be started.

"Pull out! Pull out!" cried Rob, as he saw it, "here comes the engine."

But there was no need to tell his followers that. Every boy in the village knew the old Vigilant and had seen it go screeching and lurching to a dozen fires. They rushed the hose cart up on the sidewalk as the engine came swinging nearer. It looked quite inspiring with its flaming stack, hissing jets of steam and thunder of horses'

hoofs. The driver, Ed Blossom, was belaboring his steeds furiously.

Suddenly, out into the middle of the road darted a tiny little girl. In the excitement and confusion no one noticed her at first. She stood there apparently oblivious of the approaching fire engine for one instant. Then, although she saw her doom thundering down on her, she still stood as helplessly as a tiny bird fascinated by a glowing-eyed serpent.

"Out of the way! Run! Run!" shrieked a dozen frenzied voices as several people perceived the child's danger.

"Great Scotland! She'll be killed," cried Mer-ritt.

The engine was almost opposite the hose cart as the Scouts took in the scene, but with one spring Merritt darted right in the path of the heavy machine. It happened so quickly that no one quite knew what had happened until they saw a second figure in the path of the Juggernaut.

To snatch up the child was the work of an

instant; but in that instant, as a groan from the horror-stricken onlookers testified, it looked as if Merritt's doom had been sealed.

Ed Blossom tugged frantically at his horses' bits and swerved them a trifle as he saw what was before him. As Merritt sprang backward with the agility of an acrobat, clasping the child in his arms, Ed succeeded in swinging just a little more. The horses grazed Merritt as they snorted and reared.

Suddenly there came a crash and a loud, tearing, ripping sound and the rear of the fire-engine was seen to collapse on one side. In pulling out to avoid running down Merritt and the little girl, Ed Blossom had quite forgotten, under the stress of the moment, the trees that grew on each side of the road. The hub of the rear wheel had struck one of these and the wheel had been torn off completely. If Ed had not been strapped to his seat he would have been hurled to the road.

A half hysterical woman fell on Merritt's neck and covered him with tearful thanks. Then she

snatched up the child and vanished in the crowd, leaving the Boy Scout free and greatly relieved that her gratitude was to be spared him just at that time.

There was a quick hand-clasp from Rob, "Well done, old man." And then they all turned toward the wreck of the engine. Steam was hissing in clouds from the crippled bit of apparatus. Mer-ritt heard someone say that the pump had been broken. He knew then that the engine was out of commission for that night.

Men had already unhitched the plunging horses and tied them to a tree. But it was soon evident that the engine must lie where it was for the present.

"Can't do nawthin' with her," decided the foreman and Ed Blossom, after a necessarily hurried examination, "but say," continued the foreman, enthusiastically, as if the breakage of the engine was only a secondary consideration, "that rescue of the little gal was as plucky a thing as I ever seen."

And there was no one in that crowd who did not agree with him. But there was no time to linger by the engine. The thing to be done was to push on to the fire. The crowd rushed along and the foreman stopped to say to Rob aside:—

"You boys must help us keep the crowd back while we form a bucket line; it's our only chance to save the place now—and a mighty slim one," he added, as again a red tongue of flame slashed the dark firmament like a scarlet scimitar.

"There goes the last of the old 'cademy!" cried a man as he saw. "In an hour's time there won't be a stick of it left."

Without the engine to pump a stream through the pipes, the hose cart was useless and was abandoned where it rested. Under the foreman's directions the Boy Scouts invaded houses and borrowed and commandeered every bucket, pail or can they could find. Everything that would hold water was rushed to the scene.

There was a creek opposite the blazing Academy, and while the Boy Scouts held back the

crowd the firemen formed a double line and passed the filled utensils rapidly from hand to hand. As fast as they were emptied they came back again to be refilled by those at the creek end of the line. With improvised staves, cut and broken from shrubs, the boys held the crowd back. The method was this: each lad held the ends of two staves, the other ends of which were grasped by his comrades on either side of him. This formed a sort of fence and to the credit of the Hampton citizens be it said they had too much respect for the good work of the Boy Scouts to try and press forward unduly.

The Boy Scouts were on duty now. Alert, watchful, aching to be taking part in the active scene before them, they schooled themselves into doing their best in the —by comparison— humdrum task assigned to them.

The Academy, an aged brick building, was wreathed in flames. From the cupola on top, from which had sounded for so many years the morning summons to study, was spouting vivid

fire. They could see Dr. Ezekiel Jones, the head of the school, and some of the other instructors running about in the brilliantly lighted grounds and saving armfuls of books and papers. The fire appeared to be on the middle floors. At any rate up to this time it had been possible for the men bent on saving what they could to dart in at the big front doors, reappearing with what they had been able to salvage from the flames.

With the pitifully inadequate means at their command, the firemen could do little more than work like fiends at passing buckets. It was necessary to be doing something, but even the stoutest hearted and most hopeful of the onlookers knew that the case was hopeless.

Suddenly there appeared, from no one knew exactly where, a little pale-faced man with sandy whiskers. He wore overalls and was hatless. A woman, a white-faced woman, clung to his arm desperately.

"No, Eben," she kept screaming, "not you, too! Not you, too I"

"Let me go, Jane!" the pallid little man kept shouting in reply. "It's our baby, we've got to get him out!"

He made a struggle toward the blazing building, but the woman clung to him frenziedly. Now a fireman rushed at him and added his strength to the woman's.

"Great Scotland," gasped Merritt, who stood next to Rob, "it's old Duffy, the janitor, and his wife!"

"What is it?" cried Rob, without replying, as a fireman hastened past him. "What's the matter?"

"Her baby. She's left it in the 'cademy," came the choking answer. The man, whose face was white with helpless horror, hurried on to obey some order, while a shudder of sympathy and fear ran through the crowd. Now came more details as men hastened back and forth. The woman, thinking that her husband had the baby, had rushed from the house at the first alarm. For his part, old Duffy, the janitor, never dream-

ing that the fire would gain such rapid headway, had tried to fight it alone, thinking all the time that his wife had the infant. The true situation had just been discovered and the man was frantic to get back into the place although he was a semi-

invalid, known to suffer with heart disease.

The flames were leaping up more savagely every minute. For all the effect that the feeble dribble supplied by the bucket brigade had, they might as well have given up their efforts.

Rob felt his heart give a bound as he watched the janitor and his wife kindly, but firmly, forced back.

His pulses throbbed wildly. He gave one look at the red inferno before him. Then,—

"Here, spread your arms and take my place in line," he snapped out suddenly to Merritt.

The next instant his lithe young figure darted across the flame-lit open space in front of the school. He knew the interior of the old building like a book, and that would aid him in the task

he had steeled himself to perform. He rushed up to the group about the shrieking woman.

"What room is your child in?" he cried, his heart seeming to rise in his throat and choke back the words.

"That one on the south corner," cried the woman mechanically, staring at him with frightened eyes. "See, the flames are getting nearer to it! Oh, my baby! My baby !"

She gave a terrible scream and sank back. Had they not caught her she would have fallen. When she opened her eyes again there was a roar all about her that was not the roar of the flames.

It was the tremendous, awestricken turmoil of the crowd. They had seen a boyish figure dart from the fainting woman's side, shake off a dozen detaining hands, and then, wrapping his coat about his head, dash by a back entrance into the burning building.

As he flung open the door and vanished, a great puff of smoke rolled out. The cry of awed admiration for such bravery changed to a groan

of despair,—the terrible voice of massed human beings seeing a lad go to his death. For, as the flames crackled upward more relentlessly than before, it did not seem within the bounds of possibility that anyone could enter the place and emerge alive.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FIRE TEST.

Touched with reckless bravery, foolhardiness in fact, as Rob's act had appeared to be, yet ha had not acted without taking due thought. As always in emergencies, his mind worked with great swiftness. He had no sooner made up his

mind that it was his duty, cost what it might, to save that innocent little one's life, than he had hit upon a plan.

If the child was lodged in the center of the building, he knew full well that long before its life must have been yielded up to the fire demon. But if the quarters of the janitor were, as he believed, in the south corner of the school, then there was still a chance. The mother's words had put him out of all doubt on this score and Rob instantly determined to face the most daring act of his life.

The rooms at the south side of the building had been used by the Academy boys as a gymnasium before their present quarters were built, so that Rob was thoroughly familiar with the stairways leading to them. So far as he could see it would be possible, by using a side door^ to dodge the flames shooting up the center of the building. There was a winding stairway that existed on this side of the structure quite independent of the main flight which, by this time, must have fallen in.

With Rob, to arrive at a decision was to act upon it. As we have seen, he had lost no time in making for the doorway. He had, in fact, a double reason for his haste. For one thing, every second would count, and, for another, he realized that to many in the crowd his act would appear to border on madness, and that an attempt might be made to hold him back.

"The boy's a fool!" yelled someone in the crowd behind Merritt.

Quick as a flash Rob's chum faced around,

indignation shining in his eyes, which had, a second before, been dimmed with tears.

"No, sir ; however Rob makes out, he's a hero," he shot back, while a murmur of approbation ran through the crowd.

"Keep your places, boys," he ordered the next instant, for the Scouts, half wild with anxiety and excitement, were beginning to waver and allow the crowd to surge forward. Merritt's words stiffened them. In a moment they were recalled to a sense of that duty of which they had just witnessed such a conspicuous example.

The instant Rob crossed the threshold of that door he found himself surrounded by smoke. But he bent low, and throwing his coat more closely above his head, he crouched on all fours so as to get below the level of the acrid fumes that made his eyes smart cruelly. Suddenly he stumbled over something, and as he saw in the dim light what it was he gave a glad gasp. It was a bucket of water, left on the stairway after the regular Saturday scrubbing.

Rob was a Scout who knew, from careful study of his Manual, just what to do in emergencies. He recalled now

that in case of being compelled to enter a smoky, blazing building, it was recommended to bind a wet cloth over mouth and nostrils in such a way as to act as a respirator. Instantly he saturated his handkerchief in the water and bound it on his face in the manner advocated.

Then he began what was to prove a terrible climb. The school was three stories in height, the lower two floors containing study rooms and offices and the top floor lumber rooms and the apartments occupied temporarily by the janitor.

Breathing with more ease now that he had bound up his face, Rob fought his way upward. It was as murky as a pit, and it seemed that the stairs were interminable. Suddenly he stumbled and fell headlong. He had gained the first landing. Through a door opening upon it jets of flame, like serpents' tongues, were beginning to shoot Rob staggered toward the door and slammed it to. He knew that this was abso*

lutely necessary, for in the case of the staircase being in flames when it came time for him to retrace his steps his retreat would be cut off.

But that was a thought he did not dare to dwell upon. Steeling himself anew he pushed stubbornly on to the next flight.

"It's lucky I know this place as well as I do," he thought, as

he gamely kept up the fight against what appeared almost overwhelming odds.

As he climbed higher it grew hotter. The place was like the interior of a volcano. Beyond the wall of the stairway Rob could hear the flames roaring like the beat of the surf on a rocky coast. It almost seemed as if the fire demon possessed an articulate voice and was howling his rage and defiance at the boy who had dared to face his terrors. But, hot as it was growing, Rob yet found some small grain of comfort in the fact that the smoke was not so thick.

He breathed more freely even if his throat was becoming dry as dust and whistled in an

odd way as he climbed higher. At last he reached

the summit of the second flight.

He paused irresolutely on the landing. Several iloors opened off it. Now that he was actually there, Rob was confused for an instant. He was not quite so sure of his bearings as he had thought he would be. But the roar of the flames below and about him warned him to lose not a second of precious time in procrastination.

He plunged into the door nearest at hand. Within he found himself in a room which was evidently a dining room. Supper was ready spread on the table. A lamp illumined the

scene. How odd it seemed to be gazing at this peaceful domestic setting, while below and to one side of him, devouring flames were roaring and leaping. Save for a strong smell of smoke and a slight bluish haze, the room might have been a thousand miles away from the flaming building in which it was located.

Suddenly, as the boy stood there looking swiftly

about him, there came a crash that shook the whole place like an earthquake.

"A floor's fallen !" gasped Rob. "Pray heaven it's not taken any part of that stairway with it !"

Brave as he was, the young scout turned pale and actually shook for an instant like a leaf. He knew full well that if that stairway, or any part of it, was gone, he was doomed to die as irrevocably as if a death sentence had been pronounced upon him. All at once, from a room opening off the dining room came a wailing cry.

"Muvver! Muvver, I'se fwightened!"

Rob's heart gave a quick bound and he galvanized into instant action, a great contrast to his temporary state of stupefaction!

"All right, youngster. Don't cry, I'm coming," he called out, plunging forward.

Inside the room was a small crib, with a child about three years old lying on it clasping a doll in her arms.

"Who's oo?" she demanded in some alarm, as

Rob, with his handkerchief tied over his face,

advanced.

"Me? Why—why, I'm a fireman," exclaimed Rob; and then, with an inspiration, "Let's play that the place is on fire and I'm going to save you."

The child clapped her hands and her eyes shone. Rob picked her out of her crib and cac-ried her tenderly out of the room.

"Now I'm going to cover your face just like real firemen do," he said, as they emerged on the landing and the hot breath of the furnace below was spewed up at them.

"Is dat in de game," inquired the child doubtfully, "an' will oo cover dolly's, too?"

"Yes, it's all part of the game," Rob reassured her. "Now then, there we are."

He enveloped the child in his coat which he had already removed and started for the landing. Suddenly he stopped, and from under the coat came a muffled but inquisitive

voice:

"Is 'oo cwyin', Mister Fireman?"

No, Rob was not crying; but he had just seen something that made his breath come heavingly and his heart almost stop beating. Below him he could see a dull red glow, growing momentarily brighter. No need was there for him to speculate on what that meant.

The stairway was on fire. His one means of escape from the blazing building was cut off.

For an instant Rob's head swam dizzily. He felt sick and shaky. Was he to die there in that inferno of flames ? A cry was forced wildly from his cracked lips.

"Not like this! Oh, not like this!" he begged, raising his eyes upward.

CHAPTER XII. IN PERIL OF HIS UFE.

In the meantime, outside the building suspense had reached almost the breaking- point. The Scouts still stood steady and staunch, but their faces were white and drawn. When the crash that announced the falling floor came, a man, wrought beyond the bearing point, cried out:

"There goes his last chance, poor kid!"

"Shut up, can't you," breathed a fierce, tense voice in his ear the next instant. "Don't you see his father and mother back there?"

It was only too true. Attracted by the excitement, Rob's father and mother had driven to the scene in their car. They reached it just in time to hear of Rob's heroic act. Now, white-faced and trembling, they sat hand in hand wretchedly waiting for news. As time passed and the flames rose higher without a sign of the daring lad,

their hearts almost ceased to beat. Seconds seemed hours, minutes eternity.

Then suddenly came a fearful cry. On the roof there had appeared the figure of Rob with a bundle which the crowd readily guessed to be the janitor's child clasped tightly in his arms. The flames, leaping from the cupola, illumined his form brightly and showed his pale, tense face. Thwarted in his effort to descend by the stairway, Rob had managed to reach the roof through a scuttle.

"He's done it! Hurrah ! The boy's saved the baby!" went up an ear-splitting cry from the unthinking in the crowd.

The others knew only too well that the reason that Rob had appeared on the roof betokened the terrible fact that his escape had been cut off. He was making a last desperate stand, with the flames drawing closer, and threatening to

burst through the roof at any moment.

Every eye in that crowd was fixed on the solitary figure on the roof.

"Ladders! Get ladders," yelled the foreman, hoping against hope that one could be found tall enough to reach to that height.

Rob came forward to the cornice, and looked over as if gauging the height. They saw him shake his head. Then he looked behind him. Alas, there, too, all hope of escape was cut off. Between himself and an iron fire-escape at the back of the building, tongues of flame were now shooting through the roof.

"He's shouting something. Keep still, for heaven's sake!" came Merritt's voice suddenly.

A death-like silence followed. Then above the roar and crackle came a faint sound. It was Rob calling out some commands.

"A rope!—shoot it up here," was all they could distinguish.

Merritt darted forward and stood below the walls.

""Louder, Rob! Louder!" he besought.

"A rope! Bow—arrow—shoot it up!" came Rob's voice,

audible to few, but his chum Merritt

was the only one that understood. He was back among the Scouts in a flash. He seized Paul Perkins by the shoulder.

"Paul, your house is nearest. Run! Run as you never ran before and get your archery bow and lots of arrows."

Paul didn't stop to ask the meaning of this strange command, but darted off at top speed, the crowd opening for him.

"Ropes! Ropes and lots of string!" shouted Merritt next, appealing to the throng. Those who were closest realized that a plan to save Rob — although what it was they couldn't imagine — was to be tried. Neighbors of the Academy ran off at once and in a few minutes the Scouts were busy, under Merritt's directions, knotting ropes together to form one long line.

When this had been done, Merritt measured with his eye the height of the Academy walls. Then he set them to work knotting light twine together in as long a line as they could make.

By this time Paul was back with the bow and

arrow that the Scouts used at archery practice.

"Give it here," ordered Merritt tersely if ungrammatically.

What he was going to try was a repetition of the trick that had rescued some of the Eagle Patrol when they were imprisoned on the top of Ruby Glow in the Adirondacks on their memorable treasure hunt.

With a hand that was far from steady, Merritt knotted the end of the light string to an arrow. Then, placing the arrow in position, he drew the bow. It was plain enough to the dullest-witted now what he meant to do. His plan was to shoot the arrow, with the string attached, up on the roof where Rob could seize it. This done, it would be possible for the latter —if he had time— to haul up the rope, knot it to a chimney and slide down. It was a daring, desperate plan, but none other offered, and the fact that Rob had suggested it showed that his nerve was not likely

to fail him in what might be aptly described as a supreme test.

Amid a dead silence Merritt let the arrow fly. It shot through the air, but instead of reaching the roof it struck the wall and rebounded. A cry went up from the watching crowd as it fell, having failed to accomplish its purpose. If Rob's face changed as he stood up there on the edge of the fire-illumined roof, it was not visible to those below him, keen as his disappointment must have been.

But Merritt was almost sobbing as he picked up the arrow and fitted it afresh for another trial. As he drew the bow with every ounce of strength he possessed, his lips moved in prayer that his next effort might be successful. At any moment now, the foreman of the fire-fighters told him, the roof might collapse, carrying with it the brave boy and his childish burden.

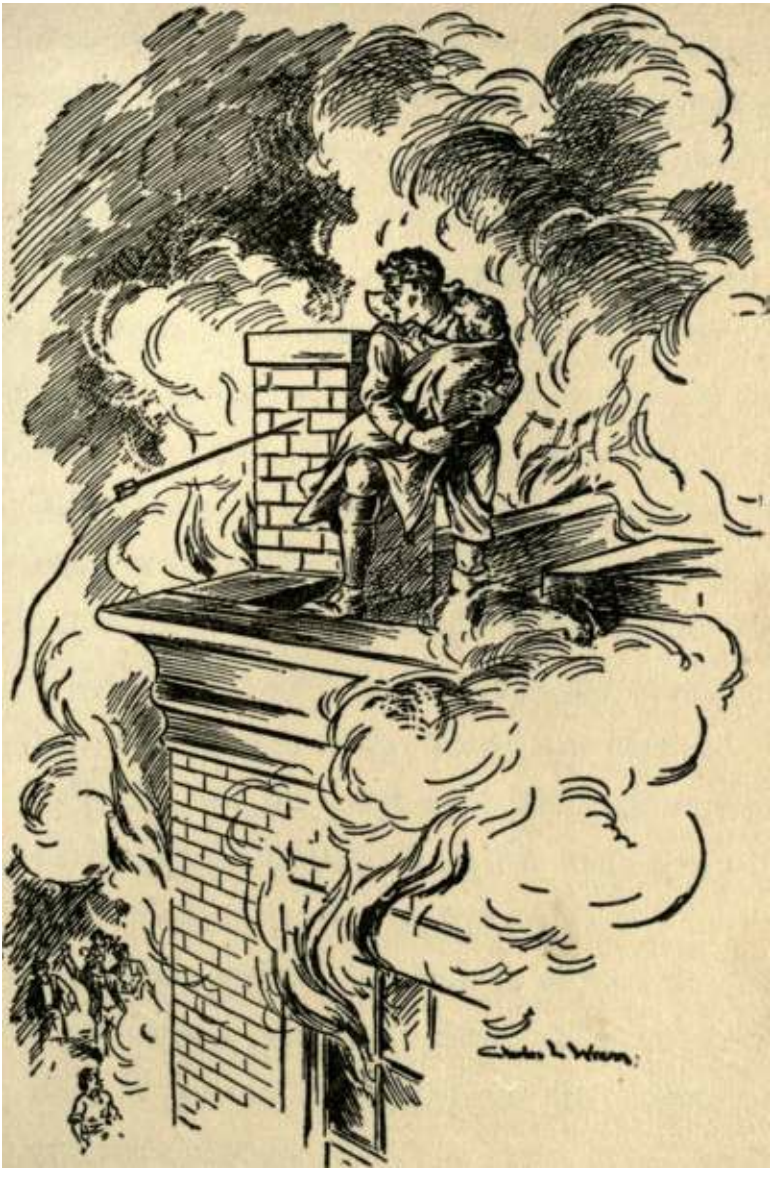
On the outskirts of the crowd, too, a white-faced man and woman were imploring Divine Providence to nerve Merritfs arm and aim. For

one instant the bowstring* was drawn taut till it seemed that the bow must snap under the terrific pressure.

Then suddenly the string fell slack, the arrow whizzed through the air and a mighty cheer split the sky as it winged true and swift to the roof top, falling almost at Rob's feet. Hand over hand he drew in the string, and at last he had hauled up enough rope to knot one end fast about some ornamental stone work at a corner of the building.

While doing this he had laid the child down. Now he was seen to pick her up again, and holding her in his arms for an instant he appeared to consider. To slide down that rope he must have at least one arm free. How was he going to do it? The crowd almost forebore to breathe as they sensed what the boy on the roof was puzzling over.

It was Rob's scout training that solved the problem—one of life and death for him—as tht same training is doing all over the world for



The Arrow whizzed through the air * * * *, falling almost at

Rob's feet.— Page 128.

lads in every grade of life to-day. He was seen to give the child some emphatic instructions and then throw her over his left shoulder much as he might have done with a bag of meal. In this position the child's head hung down between his shoulders. Her legs were across his chest.

Seizing the baby's left arm so that it came over his right shoulder, Rob extended his left hand between its knees and grasped the little one's wrist firmly. In this position she was held perfectly securely in what all Boy Scouts know as "The Fireman's Lift," one of the most useful accomplishments a Boy Scout can master.

This done, the most difficult, dangerous part of Rob's task came. He had to slide down that rope with his burden on his shoulder with only his right arm and his legs to depend on for a grip. But it had to be done. Without hesitation he swung himself from the coping and gripped the rope.

For one terrible instant he shot down for a foot or so before he succeeded in checking his

downward plunge. But his knees gripped the rope and his right arm stood the strain, although he felt as if it must snap.

How he reached the ground Rob never knew. Those last terrible moments on the roof had come rery near to breaking

his nerve. He was conscious of a sudden flare of light and a crash as his feet touched the ground. It crossed his mind hazily that part of the roof must have fallen in— perhaps the part on which he had been standing. Then came a rush of feet, shouts, cries, and arms flung about him, and through it all Rob could hear his mother's glad cry of relief after the awful tension she had endured. He tried to say something and failed, and then everything raced round and round him at breakneck speed.

"He's fainting!" he was conscious that somebody was shouting, and he could hear himself, only it seemed like somebody else, saying:

"No, I'm all right," and then everything grew blank to the Boy Scout who had won, through "Being Prepared" for a great emergency.

CHAPTER XIII. THE: ENEMY'S MOVE.

Rob Blake was sitting- on the porch of his home in Hampton. In his hand was a book on Woodcraft. But he was not just now devoting his attention to the volume. Instead he let it hang idly from one hand while he gazed up through the maple tops and dreamed of many things. As Rob himself would have put it, the "spring was in his blood." More strongly than usual that morning he felt the "red gods calling."

Suddenly two hands were thrown over his eyes from behind

and a voice cried:

"Surrender, you leader of the Eagles ! That's one time you're caught napping."

"Tubby!" exclaimed Rob, springing up and facing round.

"How in the world did you get in?" he asked

the next minute. "I never heard you coming, and "

He broke off with a laugh as his eyes fell on a big section of apple pie with one crescent-shaped bite missing, that the fat boy was regarding affectionately.

"Oh, I see. The back door, eh?" he inquired.

"Ye-es," drawled Tubby, "and I must say your cook makes good pie and is inclined to look favorably on a starving Scout."

"Starving! Why, it's not two hours since breakfast!"

"Well, two hours is a long time—sometimes," mumbled Tubby, who had taken another bite while Rob was speaking.

"What news from the Academy, Tubby?"

"Haven't you heard? They haven't been able to find another building big enough to house the scholars, so I guess it's a

holiday till the beginning of September for all of us," cried Tubby with shining eyes. "Hullo, what's that? A Latin grammar?"

AT THE PANAMA CANAL

He picked up a volume that lay on an adjoining chair. He regarded it attentively for a few seconds and then flung it forth into the garden where it landed in a rose bush.

"Let it lie there till September," he chuckled. "Well, how are you anyhow, old fellow?" he rattled on. "It's a week since the fire and you ought to be feeling fit again."

"Never felt better in my life, although I waa knocked out quite a bit; but you see I've had very good care, and "

"Oh yes, Lucy Mainwaring has been to see you —once or twice, hasn't she?" and Tubby, with an air of apparent abstraction, fell to studying a white cloud that happened to be drifting by far above them. Suddenly he faced about with a mischievous laugh.

"You looked sort of pale when I came in, Rob," he chuckled, "but you've got plenty of color now."

Rob, boy-like, looked embarrassed and changed the subject rather abruptly.

"Everything fixed for that meeting at headquarters to-night?"

he asked.

A rather odd look passed over the fat boy's face.

"Oh yes, it's all ready," he said with rather a marked emphasis on the words.

"Good; you and Merritt must have worked hard."

"We've all taken our part. The hall looks bully. It'll be dandy to have you around again."

The meeting the boys referred to was the regular weekly meeting of the patrol. But when Rob reached the hall above the bank that night he felt rather astonished to find that chairs and stools had been arranged all over the spacious hall, and that decorations consisting of the Stars and Stripes and the Eagle Patrol flags were strung everywhere. Off the main hall opened the Scouts' gymnasium and general store room. In this room Rob found his Scouts assembled. They greeted him with a cheer as he appeared. Rob began to feel uneasy. He hated anything

like that, but he took the congratulations that were showered upon him in the spirit in which they were offered.

When he found an opportunity he drew Merritt aside.

"What are all the chairs arranged outside for ?" he asked suspiciously.

"Oh, just so that the folks can see what we've been doing with our time during the winter," was the reply. "We've arranged some single stick bouts and an exhibition drill and so on— you don't mind, do you?"

"No, it's a fine idea," declared Rob warmly. "How soon will the company—audience I mean —arrive ?"

"Guess they're beginning to come now," said Merritt as the sound of feet tramping into the hall became audible.

"Better send out Walter and Martin to act as ushers, hadn't you?"

"Yes, I guess so," and Merritt hastened off

to dispatch the two second class Scouts referred to.

The hall filled rapidly. In the front rows Rob could see his parents and beside them Commodore Wingate, the scout master of the district, and the parents of most of the boys. The other chairs were filled with villagers and all at once—Rob's heart beat rather quicker—down the aisle came the Mainwaring party. They took the three seats which had been apparently reserved for them close to Rob's parents.

Little Andy Bowles, who arrived late, came into the gym in a state of high excitement.

Like most of the other scouts he had come in by the back

stairway which led directly into the gym. He came straight up to Rob.

"Say/' he exclaimed, after he had given the scout salute and congratulated his leader, "say, who do you think are hanging about outside ?"

"No idea," rejoined Rob.

"Why, Hodge Berry and Max Ramsay and some of that bunch. They pretended not to

notice me, but I'm sure they're up to some mischief. I could tell that by the way they sneaked off when they saw me."

"I don't see what harm they can do us," rejoined Rob, "although I don't doubt they'd like to work off some mean trick. Run along and put on your best uniform, Andy, you're late."

Everyone of note in Hampton was in the hall by this time, and when Commodore Wingate arose to make a preliminary address he was warmly applauded. He dwelt at some length on the new spirit that the Boy Scouts had brought into Hampton, and explained that while some misinformed persons appeared to think that the scout movement was a warlike one, it was in reality a great influence for peace. He reviewed the work of the Eagles for the past year and enumerated at some length the various services they had

done in the village. These included the clearing up and beautifying of vacant lots, the aiding of indigent or poor people, many little acts of kindness and help, and the setting generally

of a good example to the youth of the town and neighborhood.

"But," he went on to say, after an impressive pause, "it remained for the well-remembered night of the Academy fire to bring into notice the two most conspicuous acts of heroism the scouts have yet performed.

"I doubt if the annals of the Boy Scouts of any country show two more noble, self-sacrificing acts than those performed on that night by Leader Rob Blake of the Eagles,"—here such loud applause broke out that the speaker was compelled to pause for some minutes. When quiet was restored he went on, "and Merritt Crawford, his able lieutenant." More applause.

While this was going on Rob was shaking his fist at Merritt indignantly. Modest as most true heroes, he had, of course, already quietly received the thanks of the janitor's wife and the man himself for his daring rescue and hoped that the matter would end there. But this public acknowledgment was too much for him. As for

Merritt, he was chuckling for a minute, but as his own name

was announced he turned a fiery red and cried out in a voice that was audible to the front rows:

"Commodore, I thought you were going to leave me out!"

This caused a great laugh among those who heard it, and Rob felt revenged. But the worst ordeal for the two boys still was ahead of them. Above the din of applause that greeted the close of Mr. Wingate's speech, they heard that gentleman cry for silence. When quiet was restored he turned around toward the gymnasium door and cried:

"I now ask Rob Blake and Merritt Crawford to come forward and receive a slight token of esteem from their fellow townsmen."

"Go on!" cried the Scouts behind Rob and Merritt, under cover of a vigorous salvo of hand-clapping.

There was no use hanging back, and Rob and Merritt, looking very ill at ease, stepped out

before the crowd. If the applause had been loud before it was terrific then. The hall fairly shook under it. Timid folks glanced upward at the roof to make sure it was not going to be blown off by enthusiasm. But at last, from sheer weariness, even the most vigorous applauders ceased. Then came a cry in a stentorian voice, traced to the foreman of the Fire Vigilants.

"Three cheers for Rob Blake and Merritt Crawford!"

"Second the motion!" came a tempest of cries from all parts of the hall.

Commodore Wingate drew from his coat tail pockets two velvet boxes. He opened them and in each there lay, glittering on a bed of purple plush, two miniature firemen's helmets of solid gold set with diamonds. On the back of each was inscribed: "From a grateful community to a Boy Scout hero." Then followed the date, the name of the boy receiving the gift and the village seal. Stepping forward the Scout Master pinned to the breast of each lad the gleaming trophies

which would ever be among their proudest possessions.

In the fresh applause that followed there were a few who did not join. These were Max Ramsay, Hodge Berry and their cronies, all of whom cordially disliked the Boy Scouts and hated to see them the idols of the village. While the applause was still sounding in lusty salvoes they slipped out with mischievous looks on their faces. Perhaps Andy Bowies' guess that they were up to some prank designed to work harm to the Boy Scouts was not so far from the mark.

To relate in detail all that took place that evening would occupy too much space. Suffice it to say that the drills and exercises went off with a snap, and that some of the games played proved full of laughter and merriment. As the

audience filed out, more than one former lukewarm citizen was heard to remark that the Boy Scout organization was a "mighty fine thing for lads, and that the Eagles in particular not only shone

themselves, but reflected credit on their home town/'

But with the departure of the crowd, all was not over. For some time, the boys' gym buzzed with chat and laughter. Naturally, Rob and Merritt were the centers of attraction, and the two gold, diamond-studded helmets were handed about till it seemed that they must actually wear out from constant handling! At last it was too late to delay their departure for home any longer. When the impromptu meeting did finally break tip, however, every fellow belonging to the Eagles felt deep down in his heart that their organization, despite criticism and even open enmity, had proved its right to exist, and, what was more, had even proved its necessity in raising ideals and standards among the lads of the community.

"We'll march out, fellows," declared Rob, "and as each chap's home or corner is reached he can fall out of the ranks."

"Good idea," was the cry, and then:

"Fall in! Fall in!" shouted Merritt.

"Lights out," was the next order and the pushing of the electric light switch plunged the place into darkness.

"March!" and off they went, two by two, each Scout marching as smartly as a trained veteran.

Outside, on the landing, it was very dark. The blackness was made, so to speak, doubly black by the fact that they had just been in a brilliantly lighted room.

"Look out for the steps, boys! They're steep !" warned Rob, as his detachment of young Scouts marched downward.

Hardly had he spoken when the two lads marching in front, Hiram and Paul, gave a stumble and a yell. The next instant they rolled down the steep stairway to the street. Before they could take advantage of the warning, three more pairs, including Merritt, had likewise executed a bob forward and gone toppling down the staircase to the sidewalk. They all landed in a heap.

"Look out there! The steps have been soaped!"

Rob had just time to call out and save the rest from disaster.

The light from a street lamp gave a feeble gleam on the struggling group below. The rest of the boys, huddled for a moment above, by exercising great care, managed to get over the well-soaped and slippery steps without coming to grief. One of them was Andy Bowles.

"I just thought that Max Ramsay and Hodge Berry and their bunch were up to some tricks when I saw them round here, and I guess I was right, too. How about it, Rob?"

"I'm inclined to think you were," responded Rob. "How are you, fellows? All right?" he asked as the downfallen Scouts picked themselves up.

"All present and accounted for," declared Merritt, as they all stood up, vigorously brushing dust and dirt from their trig uniforms, "except for a few bruises I guess we're all right."

"Hark!" cried Hiram suddenly, "what's that?"

From somewhere near by, possibly from some

bushes that grew further down the street came the sound of suppressed giggling and cat-calls. There was no doubt as to what excited the merriment of the unseen scoffers, nor was there, in fact, any difficulty in guessing their identity.

Rob hardly knew whether to laugh or be angry. Others of the Patrol had no such hesitancy.

"It's that Max Ramsay crowd," shouted Tubby angrily. "Come out here if you're not cowards."

A sound of scuffling and retreating footsteps followed this challenge.

"There they go," shouted Hiram, "the sneaks!"

"Let's capture some of them and make them pay dearly for those soapy stairs!" shouted PauL

"What about it, Rob?" asked Merritt anxiously.

But Rob shook his head.

"Let them go," he said. "None of us are hurt, and if they are mean enough to find satisfaction in such tricks, let them."

"Well, I'll take it out of them for this skinned

ankle sooner or later," declared Tubby, hopping about and nursing the injured member.

"Same here/' came from one or two of the Scouts angrily. "They won't get away with anything like that."

"Humph! I've just recollected," said Tubby suddenly. "There's some rule or other that says Scouts mustn't fight."

Rob was instantly appealed to by half a dozen anxious voices owned by the victims of the soapy stairs.

"Well," he said, "of course no Scout is supposed to engage in fisticuffs except in actual self-defense; but—well I guess there's a limit."

"And it's been reached," muttered Tubby vindictively.

"Fall in!" cried Rob.

"Humph! I just fell down," grunted Tubby.

And then, without more discussion of the mean trick that had been played them, the Scouts marched off. After that glorious evening they all felt that they could well afford to ignore such

contemptible pranks as those of Max Ramsay and his crowd.

As for Rob and Merritt, proud as they felt of the honor that had been paid them that night, they somehow could not help valuing even more highly the quiet thanks that had come to them from full hearts before the public demonstration had been thought of. It is a Scout's duty to do his work without hope of reward, save that which comes from a sense of work well done, which, after all, is the best reward and the most enduring that any boy, or man, either, for that matter, can have.

CHAPTER XIV.

A NOVEL PROPOSAL.

"Well, what do you think of my proposal?"

Mr. Mainwaring's eyes twinkled as he regarded the three

lads seated opposite him in the library of his home which he had called Ancon Hill, possibly in remembrance of that other Ancon Hill in the far off Canal Zone.

Tubby gulped; Merritt's eyes shone and his face flushed excitedly, but he couldn't find words just then.

"Well, Rob, what do you say to transplanting the Boy Scouts, or part of them, down along the big Ditch?"

"I—I—that is, we—it's too big—too glorious to just realize it all at once, isn't it, fellows?" stammered Rob.

"Pshaw! I thought the motto of your clan was 'Be Prepared'. Now you ought to be just

as much prepared to accept my invitation to go to Panama as you would be to cook a meal in a given time or light a fire with one match."

Mr. Mainwaring regarded the young faces opposite him with a quizzical look. Then he spoke again.

"I know just what you fellows are thinking," he said. "You'd like to go, but "

"It's—it's our folks, you see " Tubby

managed to sputter. The others nodded solemnly. This proposal of Mr. Mainwaring's, that while the Academy was

closed they should go as his guests to the Canal Zone and see the wonders of that region, both natural and man-made, had fairly taken them off their feet, as the saying is.

"We'll come to that part of it later," responded Mr. Mainwaring. "I shouldn't be surprised," he added with a twinkle in his eyes, "if it could all be arranged satisfactorily. You see, I'm not going to take you lads down there to idle. Far from it. Idleness is the worst thing for boys or men. I've work for you to do. As I told

you, this young scamp Jared, who is really more fool than knave, has skipped out for the Isthmus. That I have found out as you know. With him went Alverado and Estrada, the latter having suddenly resigned his diplomatic post at Washington. A third party went also, who I more than suspect is the keen-faced young man you told me you had seen in Jared's company at the barn, at the ball game, and also on the evening Jared took his abrupt departure.

"Now, of course, they are on the qui vive on the Isthmus for this precious outfit who, undoubtedly, mean mischief of some sort. Just what it is I am not prepared to say, but I can tell you that I have a shrewd suspicion. Now you boys have plenty of pluck, resource and enterprise—don't turn red, I'm not in the habit of flattering anybody and I mean it. You are the only people that I know of that have actually seen Alverado and who would be able to pick out this miserable, misled Jared."

"You want us to do detective work!" gasped Tubby in an awe-struck tone.

Mr. Mainwaring laughed and threw up his hands.

"Heaven save the mark! I suspect you of reading dime novels, Master Tubby. No, there is nothing Old-Sleuth-like about what I would want you to do; nothing very thrilling or exciting about it. I'd simply want you to accompany me and maybe point out the men you have seen plotting together, for the benefit of the Isthmian police ; so you see there is no danger, no glamour, no promise of adventure about it; only a humdrum trip, but one that I am sure will prove full of interest."

Had Mr. Mainwaring possessed a prophetic eye he might not have spoken exactly as recorded above. But not being blessed with such an organ he, of course, had no means of knowing into what danger and adventure the Boy Scouts were destined to be thrust while on the Isthmus.

"Oh, but we'd like to go!" sighed Rob.

"It's like a beautiful dream," struck in Merritt with a far-away look in his eyes.

"I suppose that there's plenty to eat down that way?" asked Tubby rather suspiciously.

The tension was relieved by a hearty laugh from them all.

"Well, I only asked, you know," remarked Tubby in an injured tone.

"And now that that's all explained," said Mr. Mainwaring, after the merriment had subsided, "I may as well tell you that all your parents know of my wish and are quite willing that you should go, in spite of the fact that for some weeks they will be deprived of your interesting society. And "

But all discipline was at an end for the nonce. The boys' spirits fairly broke bounds. They leaped up, joined hands and danced round in a circle. It was like some impossible, glorious dream coming true; for each of them had long cherished a desire to see Uncle Sam's wonderful

digging operations which, under the Stars and Stripes, were to join two mighty oceans.

In the midst of the excitement the door opened and in came Fred Mainwaring; but Lucy was not with him, rather to the disappointment of one of the Scouts. Fred, after the boys had all shaken hands warmly and indulged in another war dance, announced that his sister had had to leave suddenly for the West the night before, as her mother, who was stopping with relatives there, had absolutely forbidden the project of taking her along.

It was not till after they had taken their leave and were

walking with Fred down the drive leading to the road back to Hampton that Lucy's brother seized an opportunity to draw Rob aside.

"What are you looking so glum about?" he demanded with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Who? Me?" rejoined Rob indignantly, "I never felt better in my life."

But his looks belied him. And, strange to say,

Rob's gloom dated from the moment that Fred had announced Lucy's departure.

"Say, old fellow," laughed Fred merrily, "if you don't remind me of the ostrich in the fable! Here,—here's her address,—take it and be happy. Bless you, my children," and without waiting for an answer, Fred thrust a bit of paper into Rob's hand and darted off with a merry:—

"See you to-morrow. We'll have lots to talk about."

Rob rejoined his companions, who had walked on some distance ahead. His gloomy look had vanished like snow in the spring.

"Isn't it great, glittering, glorious?" cried Merritt as he came

up.

"I simply can't believe it yet," cried Tubby. "I'm afraid I'll wake up like I do some nights when I'm dreaming about a banquet at which I'm an honored guest."

" and I can always send postcards from

the Isthmus," breathed Rob, which remark did not seem very germane to the conversation. His

companions looked at him in amazement for an instant and then, comprehending, broke into a roar of laughter, for which Rob chased them half way back to Hampton, catching Tubby at last and belaboring that stout youth till he roared for mercy.

But the fat boy had his revenge. As soon as he was released he sought a safe refuge and then, holding his staff like a guitar, he rolled his eyes upward in imitation of a troubadour, and howled at the top of his voice:—

"On a bee-yoot-i-ful night! With a bee-yoot-i-ful gy-url!"

Rob didn't know whether to laugh or be angry.

CHAPTER XV. OFF FOR THE ISTHMUS.

The $S. Caribbean lay at her dock at the foot of West Twenty-fifth Street, New York City, with steam up in readiness for her departure for Colon, which, as every boy knows, is the easterly port of the Canal Zone and the terminus on that side of the Isthmus of the Panama Railroad. Everything appeared to be a perfect maze of confusion. Derricks rattled, steam winches roared and wagons clattered about the dock in every direction. From the 'scape pipe of the big steamer white wisps of steam were pouring, while black smoke rolled from the squat, black funnel. At the foremast flew the Blue Peter, that blue flag with a square white center that, all the world over, signifies "Sailing day."

Down Twenty-fourth Street, hurrying with all their might, came three bovs whom, even had

they not worn their Scout uniforms, we should have had no difficulty in recognizing as Rob, Mer-ritt and Tubby. All

were laden down with packages,—things bought at the last moment. The main part of their equipment was already on board. As we know, their numerous camping expeditions had provided for them so amply in that way that it had hardly been necessary to buy anything in that line. Tents, cooking outfits, and so on, they had long possessed.

But on board the ship, in the stateroom they were all three to share, reposed their proudest possessions: three blue-steel automatic revolvers with their cartridge belts, etc., and three brand new automatic rifles of heavy caliber. The latter had been the gift of Mr. .Mainwaring, while the revolvers the boys had bought themselves on his recommendation. It was quite likely, it appeared, that they would explore some of the upper reaches of the Chagres River, a region infested by big snakes, jaguars and alligators, and weapons were more or less of a necessity.

Good-byes had been said early that morning when an admiring, if slightly envious, cohort of Scouts, with the village band at their heads, had escorted them to the train for New York. It had been a period of glorious excitement up to that time, but when the moment came to say the last good-byes and they had waved and given the Scout cry for the last time, the three lads felt strangely sober. This supernatural depression of spirits had endured till they reached New York, where their last shopping excursion for some time diverted their thoughts and drove away the blues. So that it was a laughing, merrily chatting trio that came at a brisk

walk down Twenty-fourth Street on its way to meet Mr. Mainwaring and Fred at the steamer. All felt that their departure for the tropics meant a new epoch in their lives. As for their friends at home, the Hampton local paper had devoted a column to the lads' departure, calling them "Hampton's Boy Scout Pioneers."

How much they wished that they could have

brought all the Eagles with them to share their anticipated experiences! But that was manifestly impossible, and so, as the next best thing, Tubby carried a camera and an ample supply of films with which to make all the pictures he could to be shown to admiring audiences on their return.

The water front opposite the sailing place of the West India and South American ships is a busy spot. Life boils over thereabouts and the boys felt quite bewildered as they faced the broad street packed with rumbling wagons and swearing drivers and stevedores that lay between them and the dock bearing in big white letters the magic words: Panama Steamship Company.

They were just about to cross the street when their attention was suddenly distracted by the sound >f some sort of scuffle or argument going on near at hand. Facing about they were not long in discovering what the trouble was. Drawn up against the curb was a small peddler's handcart, covered with rosy apples piled high in tempt-.

ing fashion. Behind it stood a kindly-looking old woman who just at that moment appeared to be very much flustered and excited. The cause was soon apparent.

Above the quavering voice of the old woman came a loud, blustering one that the boys were swift to recognize.

"Max Ramsay! What in the world is he doing here?"

"And Hodge Berry is with him and two other boys that look like city fellows," struck in Mer-ritt. "What are they up to?"

"It's plain enough that they are plaguing that poor old woman," exclaimed Rob, "and it wouldn't surprise me if they had come down here to see us off on the steamer and try to make trouble of some kind. I heard they were staying with Ramsay's cousins in the city till the school was rebuilt."

"Well, it's a shame, anyhow," cried Merritt indignantly.

He had just seen what the Hampton worthies

and their friends were up to. They had amused themselves by plaguing the old woman till she was half beside herself, and then, while she waa berating one of them, the others would steal some apples.

"Why, it's downright thievery," cried Rob.

"That's just what it is. Just what I'd expect from such cads,"

cried Merritt, fully as angry.

"They look like good apples, too," commented Tubby, regarding the fruit with the eye of an expert in such matters.

"Well, if you aren't the limit," exclaimed Merritt, giving him a disgusted look.

"Haven't I got a right to give my opinion?" 1 asked the fat Scout demurely.

"Well, of all the mean skunks," cried Rob indignantly, with a darkening brow. "See, the poor old woman is lame. She's got a crutch there. She can't get after them and that's why they are so bold."

"Come on, and stop it," exclaimed Merritt

impulsively, "I can't stand for anything like that."

"Better get a policeman," suggested Tubby prudently.

"I don't see one in sight," rejoined Rob; "I guess it's up to us to stop it."

"Here's where I get even for that tumble I took, Scout rules or no Scout rules," muttered Tubby to himself as the three lads advanced.

Max Ramsay was contentedly munching a big red apple as

they approached. He was too much engrossed with laughing at the anger of the old woman and the mean pranks of his friends to notice the trio of determined looking lads nearing him. He had already swooped down on the stand and was now trying to divert the old woman's attention from the raids of his companions.

"Drop that apple, Max Ramsay!"

That was the first warning that Max had that the three Scouts from Hampton were on the scene. He and his companions had, as Rob guessed, come down to the steamer to make

trouble for the boys if they could. But on the way they had stopped to divert themselves at the old apple woman's expense.

Max turned a trifle pale for an instant, but then he bethought himself of his companions and grew defiant again.

"As if I'd drop it for you," he said sneeringly.

Rob's arm flashed out and seized Max's wrist. The next instant the apple was flying across the street.

"Ouch!" grunted Max, "what are you trying to do? Break my arm? Hey, fellows!"

His companions, their attention thus drawn, rallied to Max's support. But Rob, crimson with just anger, never noticed

them. Nothing made the young Scout leader more angry than cruelty or injustice to children, the old and feeble, or dumb animals. His eyes fairly blazed now as he faced Max, who looked mean and cringing beside him.

"Now get out of this, you coward," he exclaimed, grabbing Max's shoulder and giving

that worthy a good shove. "Be off and take your friends with you. You ought to be ashamed of yourselves, treating a poor old woman this way."

"Let's give 'em a good punching," muttered Tubby belligerently.

"That's what I say," chimed in Merritt; but Rob held back his two fire-eating chums.

"Oh, we're not scared of the whole bunch of you namby-pamby sissies," cried Hodge Berry, a hulking lad who, however, took good care to keep out of reach of Rob's fists. He had once witnessed what they could do and had no desire for a personal experience. Now Max's two city cousins chimed in.

"Why don't you give those toy soldiers a good hiding?" said one.

"Yes; those Boy Scouts are too dern busy," put in the other, a pale-faced, pimply lad of about seventeen.

But despite these brave remarks, neither of them made any effort to back up Max or Hodge Berry.

"All right for you. We'll fix you some time," snarled Max.

"Why not do it now?" inquired Tubby. "You're four to three, that's good odds."

"Oh, we could lick you if we wanted to. We'll do it, too, when you get back from Panama, if you ever do. I hope the 'gators eat you."

"Thank you," said Rob, laughing in spite of himself; "and as for fighting you fellows, why I don't much believe in it, but if you don't make yourselves scarce, I'll give you rowdies a lesson you won't forget."

" Yah-h-h-h-h!" was all that the apple raiders could think of to say, but they faded away from the scene in as dignified a manner as they could muster.

The three Scouts then bought some apples from the old woman, who poured out her thanks so profusely that a small crowd began to gather about her and listen.

"Come on, fellows," said Rob, "let's get out of tills."

They hurried away, followed by the old woman's "Wurra wurras," and "God bless yez fer foine byes now, even if ye

do wear haythenish clothes."

When they were out of earshot, Rob turned his attention to his badge, which he was wearing upside down. Like many other Scouts, he didn't turn it the right way up till he had lived up to the Scout rules of doing a daily kind deed. He now turned his badge the right way and so did his chums, who had adopted this rule also.

"I'd have felt better if I could have got a good crack at those chaps, though," said Tubby between bites at his apple.

Suddenly a steamer's whistle boomed out above the dock-side uproar.

"Gee whiz, fellows, that's the 'all ashore* whistle. We've got to hustle!" cried Rob.

The three Scouts broke into a run, each congratulating himself that he could present himself before Mr. Mainwaring with an "upturned badge."

CHAPTER XVI.

SOMETHING ABOUT THE CANAI,.

"Suppose you tell us what you know about Panama and the canal ?" remarked Tubby to Rob as the three boys perched in the bow of the Caribbean, three days out, watching the flying fish as the vessel's prow sent them scattering like coveys of

birds from big patches of yellow gulf weed.

"Yes, that's a good idea," supplemented Mer-ritt. "I guess we won't get much time to study books down there. Mr. Mainwaring said this. morning that, after he had given the work a preliminary look-over, he was going to hunt for the source of that tributary of the Chagres that he thinks is responsible for the big floods every rainy season."

"Well, I don't suppose I know much more

about it than you two fellows do," rejoined Rob modestly, "but I've been reading up on it."

Here he looked at Tubby, who had done nothing much on the steamer but consume three huge meals a day, with "snacks" in between, and amuse himself. One of these amusements had been stuffing some of those odd-looking pills known as "Pharaoh's Serpents" into the captain's pipe. Almost every boy can guess what happened when the glowing tobacco reached the "Serpents" and big, wriggly, writhing things began to climb out of the pipe bowl.

"Ach himmel, der sea serpent," yelled the skipper, who was a German.

"Oh-h-h-h-h-h!" screamed a lot of ladies to whom he happened to be talking.

It was just at this juncture that the captain had caught sight of

Tubby doubled up with laughter behind a ventilator. He chased and captured the fat youth, who then and there received a spanking for which he got no sympathy, even from his fellow Scouts. Except for spilling

"sneezing powder" in the main dining room at dinner time and burning an old gentleman's bald head by sun rays concentrated in a magnifying glass, Tubby had done nothing out of the way since.

"Fire away. Unload your knowledge," ordered Merritt, luxuriously stretching out under the awning.

"All right, here goes. To begin at the beginning, of course you know that Panama was discovered by Christopher Columbus in 1502."

"Ginger snaps!" interrupted Tubby. "Is there anything, except Coney Island, that he didn't discover ?"

"Shut up, can't you," cried Merritt indignantly. "Go on, Rob, it's just the nature of the beast. Never mind him."

"Well," resumed Rob, "Columbus discovered the Chagres River and sailed up it. He called the beautiful harbor by which he entered it Porto Bello. Then came Balboa, who was the first to cross the Isthmus and view the Pacific, It was

about this time that a road was built across and the city of

Panama founded on the Pacific side. It was from Panama that Pizarro set out to begin his brutal campaign which ended in the practical extinction of the Incas of Peru."

"Oh, cut out the history and let's get down to the canal," muttered Tubby; "I hate history, anyhow."

"It's my belief that you like nothing but eating," declared Merritt indignantly.

"And sleeping," put in Tubby without a smile.

"The road was fifty miles long and well paved and provided with substantial bridges, some of which are yet standing although the road is almost impassable," went on Rob. "It was the war between Mexico and Uncle Sam in 1846-47 that brought about a change. But in the meantime, I forgot to tell you that old Panama was sacked by Captain Henry Morgan and his pirates in 1671, great stores of gold taken and the inhabitants put to the torture. The city was

never rebuilt, but its ruins still stand some miles from the site of the present city."

"Well, what happened in the Mexican war?" asked Tubby.

"I'm coming to that. At that time there were not more than 9,000 miles of railroad in America, and it was a hard matter to get as far west as Chicago by rail.

"Between the East and the Pacific Coast lay great prairies, practically unexplored. Indians were thickly scattered over this region and very hostile to the white man. The journey across took months. The lack of a short route to the Pacific coast set everybody to thinking. Then, in 1849, came the great gold rush to California. Hundreds of miners went by way of the Isthmus, but there was no railroad and they got sick, and many of them died on the way across. It became clear that there must be a railroad and, at last, in 1855, after unheard of difficulties had been mastered, one was completed with American capital.

"From the first it paid tremendously, in the space of forty-seven years making $38,000,00x5 of clear profit for its projectors. But to build that forty-eight miles of track had cost 2,000 recorded human lives, five years of labor, and $8,000,000."

"First history, then a railroad year book, and now, I suppose, we'll get down to the canal," grunted Tubby.

"Yes, that's coming now," smiled Rob. "In the first place, the idea of building a canal across the narrow strip of land forming the Isthmus had been a dream even of the early Spaniards. Then a Scotchman founded a colony which was to grow rich on the products of the Isthmus and also dig a canal. Disease and failure soon put an end to this enterprise. In fact, from the earliest days Panama and the Isthmus have always been known as one of the most unhealthy spots on earth. As

you may know, it is only nine degrees north of the equator, and the rainy season lasts more than half the year. But nowa-

days, with modern medicine and modern hygienic methods, it is quite safe, with reasonable care, to penetrate the jungle. Mr. Mainwaring told £ie that," he added.

"Well, after various schemes had been gotten up and had fallen through, a French company, backed by the money of almost everyone in France who could by hook or crook secure stock, in 1882 turned the first shovelful of earth for a canal. It was to have been a sea-level one, that is, one without locks, and was projected and engineered by Ferdinand De Lesseps, the aged builder of the Suez canal.

"We know now that a sea-level canal would not be feasible on the Isthmus. It would take too long to build and cost a prohibitive sum, almost double what a lock canal costs. For seven years digging went on, with fearful loss of life among the laborers and engineers from yellow fever. Then, in 1899, it was discovered that almost half of the $400,000,000 raised had been squandered in mismanagement and waste, and by far the

larger part had gone in what we should nowadays call 'graft'. An investigation was made. Several of the promoters of the canal committed suicide, and De Lesseps went mad and died in an asylum. Such was the tragic history of the French era; but brighter days were to come.

"It was in 1898 when the Oregon made her record run from San Francisco to join the Atlantic fleet in the West Indies and fight the Spaniards off Cuba, that Americans began to think that a short cut was needed. With our acquisition of the Philippines, a "door" between the Pacific and Atlantic was declared to be almost a necessity. There was much discussion at Washington, but finally in 1903 President Roosevelt and Congress decided that if we could purchase from the French all they had left at Panama and could, in addition, buy a strip or "zone" across the Isthmus for canal building purposes, it would be fitting and right for the United States to take up the work.

"After some dickering, the French company

took $40,000,000 for what they owned, and, in 1904, the Panama Republic, a newly created nation, sold the United States for $10,000,000 a strip of land ten miles wide and fifty miles long, which strip of land is now known as the Canal Zone.

"The first thing that the Americans did after they took hold was to start a campaign against disease. No canal could be dug while yellow fever had to be reckoned with. Under the masterly hand of Col. W. C. Gorgas, the Zone has been cleaned up till disease is almost rarer than in cities of the north. Mosquitoes have been wiped out, streets paved, filth and garbage, which used to lie and rot under the hot sun, all swept away, and good comfortable houses put up for

workmen and their bosses. The men who stand the climate best among the laborers are Jamaican negroes. Hindus, Italians and Spaniards are also employed for lighter work, but for 'making the dirt fly' the Sambo is the real thing. "Anything else you'd like to know?" "Well, yes," said Merritt. "Just why is this

Chagres River such an important part of the canal?"

"Well, it's this way, as I understand it," said Rob. "In the first place, the canal is fifty miles long,—forty-one miles through the land and nine miles of channel dredged out in the harbors of Colon and Panama. From Colon to Bah Bohia the route passes for twelve miles through low, swampy ground not much above sea level. Then it cuts into the hills and is practically a more or less shallow ditch as far as a place called Mira-flores, nine miles away. The highest point of land that the canal must traverse is Gold Hill, at the famous Culebra, where it is 662 feet above the sea level.

"But right here occurs a 'saddle* through which the canal must run. This, at its lowest point, is 312 feet above sea level. Right here is the notorious Culebra Cut, which is an immense excavation nine miles long and, in places, more than three hundred feet deep in solid rock, — think of that!

"Bad as Culebra has been as an obstacle, however, the Chagres River is worse. For 23 miles the canal must follow the valley of this river and cross and recross its bed. The

Chagres is an unruly stream. At times it is small, and then again it swells to tremendous size, sweeping all before it and causing great floods. To build the canal the problem was to turn the Chagres into a friend, instead of an enemy, and that, it is believed, has been done in an unique way.

"You must now roughly picture a cross section of the canal route as a flat-topped pyramid. Suppose the top of the pyramid to be hollow and that through that hollow flows the Chagres River. Well, on one side of your cup or hollow is the famous Gatun Dam, in the construction of which 2,250,000 barrels of cement have been used. Below the Gatun Dam is a 'flight/ just like a succession of steps of locks. These will be used to lower vessels from the 'cup' at the top to the Atlantic level, — or to raise them, as the case may be.

"On the other end of the cup, on the Pacific end that is, will be another flight of locks, the Pedro Miguel and Miraflores locks, which will raise or lower vessels from and to the Pacific. Is that clear? There's a big cup at the top of our pyramid, and steps, or 'locks/ lead down to the levels of the oceans on each side."

"Oh, it's as clear as mud," muttered Tubby, "go on."

"Now, then, we get to the Chagres and the part it plays," went on Rob serenely. "That whole 'cup* at the top of our pyramid is actually an artificial lake of vast size. As a matter

of fact, it will be 165 square miles in area. At Gatun a great dam will hold it in, and at Pedro Miguel the locks will perform the same office. This lake is the valley of Chagres, and the Chagres will be relied on to keep it filled. This immense Gatun Lake, as it is called, is the 'keystone* of the canal. Any weakness in the Gatun Dam would ruin the whole project. You can see, of course, why this is so, because the water in

that Gatun Lake will be relied upon to fill the locks which will raise vessels up or down.

"But suppose the Chagres River cuts up ugly, as you said it does sometimes?" asked Merritt.

"Well," said Rob, "I heard Mr. Mainwaring say that the great lake will be so big that a flood would affect its level no more than a cup of water poured into a bath tub. The river will merely serve to keep the lake filled and supply the water needed to work the locks."

"That's a very good description, Master Rob," said a voice at their elbows.

They started and looked up, and there was Mr. Mainwaring himself looking down at them.

"We have changed the Chagres from a dangerous enemy into an excellent friend," he said, "but, as Rob pointed out, the

Gatun is unavoidably the spot at which an enemy who wished to harm us could do almost irretrievable damage at the expenditure of a few dollars' worth of dynamite, if," he paused for an instant, "if he knew just where to place it."

"Does anyone possess such knowledge?" asked Rob.

"Yes, anyone possessing a duplicate of my plans would know just how to set about dealing the canal a fearful blow," was the slow response.

Rob's pulses beat fast and thick. He caught his breath. Jared had such duplicate plans, and was in the hands of men who could work on his weak nature to give them up. He glanced up at Mr. Mainwaring, expecting to see signs of anxiety on his face. But the engineer was perfectly calm.

"After all that 'dry history/ as Tubby called it," said he, with a smile, "let's go and play shuffle board Fred is waiting for us."

CHAPTER XVII.

AT OLD PANAMA.

The week following the conversation recorded in the last chapter found the travelers located at the Hotel Grand Central, in Panama City. Colon, although the Americans have done much to clean it up and make it more presentable than in former days, does not hold much of interest. Besides, Mr.

Mainwaring's offices were at Panama, which made his presence there a necessity.

The boys had passed a busy time sight-seeing in the old city. They had climbed the Cathedral towers, gazing out over the glittering bay dotted with small but beautiful islands, where the wealthy Panamans spent the heated months. They had explored nooks and corners and inspected the oldest church on the continent.

On the particular day on which this chapter

opens they had planned an expedition to Old Panama city, which lies about five miles from the present town. Mr. Mainwaring was busy, but Fred had obtained leave to accompany the boys, his duties as his father's secretary not being very onerous. They set out in high spirits along the road leading to the ruins of the golden city sacked by Morgan and his buccaneers.

The drive was made in an aged hack, and hardly had the boys left the outskirts of the town before they were exclaiming over the luxuriant tropical vegetation and the odd sights that met their eyes on every side. Once or twice they crossed small streams, and laughed at the sight of native women pounding clothes on rocks at the water side with big, flat clubs.

"Heaven help the buttons!" cried Merritt. "This must be a

paradise for button manufac~ turers."

"I guess they don't bother much with them, at least not the natives that we've passed," chuckled Fred.

"Oh, look at that bunch of bananas!" cried Tubby presently, as they passed by a clump of green banana plants laden with fruit. "Let's hop out and get some."

But the fruit was green and uneatable. Bananas, as Tubby did not know, are picked and shipped while green, and grow yellow and ripe on the voyage north in the holds of the fruit steamers, which are kept carefully at a uniform temperature.

"It's odd that we've seen nothing of Jared or his friends," remarked Rob, as, after the discovery of Tubby's mistake, they drove on again. "Has your dad notified the police?"

"Yes, indeed," rejoined Fred Mainwaring, "but nothing has come of it as yet. Of course, a careful lookout is being kept. Say, fellows," he exclaimed in a cautious tone, "do you know I believe that some plot is on foot to injure the great Gatun Dam and delay the opening of the canal ? At least, I'm pretty sure, from things I've heard dad say, that such is the case."

"And you think, or rather he thinks, that Jared is mixed up in it?" asked Tubby breathlessly.

"That's what. At least he is mixed up in it to this extent, that he is supplying the plotters with plans of the dam and so on

in order that they can strike their blow at the weakest part of it."

"Gee whiz! I'd like to get my hands on that Jared just once," exclaimed Merritt angrily. "What a skunk he is."

"It's a pity we ever let him get away from Hampton," muttered Merritt. "Of course, we found out that he and the man with him bought tickets for New York, but that was only a blind clew at best."

"Well, we don't actually know that he is on the Zone at all," struck in Rob; "although all the steamship offices were quizzed, we couldn't find out that anybody answering Jared's description had taken passage for the Isthmus."

"So far as that is concerned," remarked Fred, "dad says that that proves nothing. He might

have shipped from San Francisco or New Orleans, or even from some Canadian port for some other destination, and then worked his way up here on a sailing vessel or coasting steamer."

"And that's just about what he would have done/' cried Rob. "Both Alverado and Estrada have plenty of sympathizers in Bogota who would help them in any plot against Uncle Sam. But, after all, the whole thing may be a false alarm."

"You wouldn't think so if you could have heard what dad said at that meeting of the Canal heads the other day," rejoined Fred. "Of course I can't tell you what took place, although I was present in my capacity as secretary; but from what I heard a strict watch is to be kept and the guards doubled."

"If Estrada and Alverado know the country well, it's quite likely that they aren't in the city at all," struck in Merritt. "The country outside the actual Canal Zone is a trackless jungle. They may be hiding up in there some place."

"That's quite likely, too," rejoined Fred. "I heard dad saying something about that the other day. By the way, we are going to start up the Chagres day after to-morrow; won't that be bully? That's my idea of sport,—following up a tropic river looking for a tributary."

"What's your dad going to do with the tributary when he finds it ?" asked the practical Tubby.

"That hasn't been settled yet," was the rejoinder. "Of course, if it proves to be the branch that feeds the Chagres and causes all the trouble in flood time, it will be dammed or something so as to make it harmless."

"Say, don't talk so loud," whispered Rob in a cautious tone, for the boys from their first low tones had gradually drifted into louder talk, "that driver is listening to every word we're

saying."

"Just like an inquisitive nigger," growled Fred resentfully.

"He's not a nigger," declared Rob; "he looks to me more like a Latin-American of some sort.

He may be a fellow countryman of this Estrada. In that case, I hope he didn't overhear anything."

"Well, you were talking as loud as any of us," declared Tubby.

"Yes, that's so. I kind of wish I hadn't."

"Look!" cried Merritt suddenly.

He had good reason to exclaim. Ahead of them, rising majestically above the brilliant-hued tropical greenery, was a vast gray tower, square and massive, and pierced with square windows. At its summit it was overgrown with mosses, lichens and many-hued flowers of gorgeous coloring. But for this, it might have seemed anything but a ruin.

"The ruined tower of the old cathedral church of St. Augustin!" cried Rob.

"And that's all that remains of the city from which Morgan took so much plunder that it required seventy-five mules and

six hundred prisoners to pack it across the Isthmus to Porto Bello," chimed in Merritt, who, it will be seen

from this remark, had been reading up on Panama.

Leaving the rig behind them, the four lads made their way to the foot of the tower. They elected to push their way through a tangle of brush instead of following the regular footpath. As Tubby said, it seemed more like coming to a ruin than by strolling up to it on a beaten track. Their tough khaki uniforms resisted the thorns and brambles valiantly, and they arrived at the foot of the massive old tower out of breath but undamaged, except for sundry scratches on their hands.

They entered the old tower through a tumbledown doorway. The walls, they noticed as they passed through, were three feet or more thick, which perhaps accounted for the sturdy piles standing so long after the rest of the city had vanished. Inside was a crumbled stairway of stone up which the four Scouts were soon scrambling. They clambered to the very top and then Rob and Fred drew from their pockets two pen-

nants. One bore the "totem" of the Eagles; the other was emblazoned with the Patrol emblem of the Black Wolves.

"I thought of this just before we left," said Rob, as he drew out the Eagle flag; "I guess we're the first Boy Scouts on the Isthmus and so we'll be the first to unfurl our totems above old Panama."

"But how are you going to make the flag fast?" asked Tubby.

"See that prickly branch growing right out from the edge of the tower? I guess I'll make mine fast to that," said Rob, "it'll be as good as a flag pole."

"Look out you don't slip," warned Merritt, as Rob made his way over roughly piled stones that had crumbled from the parapet and gained the edge of the tower. At that point a staff-like thorn bush raised one bare arm aloft. As Rob had said, it did indeed make a regular flag pole.

Balancing himself carefully, the leader of the

Eagle Patrol reached out and peered over thd edge.

"Wow, fellows, but it looks a long way to the ground!" he exclaimed. "If I ever fell, I'd land with a bump all right."

Clasping the flag in one hand, he leaned out and laid hold of the upright branch. There was a sudden cracking sound. The horrified Scouts, who were watching Rob, saw him make a desperate grab at the wall to recover himself as the branch snapped.

But Rob's effort came too late.

"He's gone!" yelled Tubby, turning as white as a ghost as Rob, without a sound, plunged over the parapet and out of sight.

His chums turned sick and faint. They dared not go to the edge to gaze upon what they knew must lie at the foot of the tower. They simply stood like figures carved out of wood waiting for the sound of Rob's crashing fall.

CHAPTER XVIII. BETWEEN EARTH AND SKY.

But no such sound came. Instead they heard something that brought them instantly to the alert.

"Hey, fellows! Come quick!"

It was Rob's voice, coming up to them over the edge of that dizzy height.

In three bounds, careless of the consequences of a false step, they were on the parapet of the tower where they had last seen Rob, as he reached out for the treacherous "flag pole."

"Look, boys! Look! There he is! Hold on, Rob, old fellow. Hold on, for heaven's sake," cried Merritt.

Rob, his feet dug into the rough interstices of the old ruinous wall, was clinging to a stoutly rooted bush that had broken his fall and given him one second in which to stay his awful plunge

into space. But his position even now was bad enough.

His face was as white as chalk, and the sweat streamed

down it in rivers as he gazed up at his comrades above. He was fully thirty feet below them, and they had no rope, no means of saving him from his fearful position! In the very nature of things his muscles, strong as they were, were bound to give out before long. It was not in flesh and blood to endure such a tension long; and then But they dared not think of that.

It was a moment for quick action and nimble wits. The shrub to which Rob was clinging appeared to be firmly rooted. In fact, it must have been, to have withstood the strain of his crashing fall. Then, too, his toes were driven home into a crack of the wall, relieving to some extent the weight brought to bear on the shrub. But this could not last indefinitely.

Suddenly Merritt noticed something. Just above the place where Rob clung to the wall, a hundred feet above the waving: banana fronds.

was an opening. As he saw this a sudden idea struck him. He thought he saw a way, a desperate way, it is true, but still a way to rescue Rob from his perilous position.

'How long can you hold on, Rob?" he called down.

"Not much longer I'm afraid," came back in a voice that could hardly have been recognized as Rob's, "can't you get a rope ?"

Merritt shook his head. He knew that a search for such an article would take too much precious time.

"No; but you hold on, old chap. Keep up a good heart and we'll get you out of that, never fear."

Turning to his companions he hastily explained his plan. An instant later the three Scouts were rushing down the crazy stone staircase headed for the opening above Rob. As soon as they reached it Merritt peered out. Rob was still there, but he looked up appealingly at his chum. Merritt knew what the look meant. Rob couldn't

hold on much longer, but dared not waste breatK in speaking.

"Now, then, fellows," spoke Merritt, turning to his chums, "what we're going to do is easy enough if you keep cool; but if you get rattled it may fail."

"We'll keep cool all right, Merritt," Fred assured him, though his breath was coming fast.

As for Tubby, his countenance did not betray the flicker of a muscle. Merritt knew he could rely on the fat boy, but of Fred's more emotional nature he had not been quite so sure.

Suddenly his eye caught sight of something that would make his task easier. In the wall of the opening was a big, rusty

iron staple. What its former use had been there was no means of guessing; but Merritt regarded it with delight. It made the daring thing he was about to attempt a little more certain of success.

"Tubby, you just hook your belt through that Staple," he ordered, "and then hang on to Fred's feet for all you are worth. Fred, you lie down

right here,—with your hands just at the edge,— that's right."

The boys obeyed Merritt's orders, but Tubby looked at him with apprehension.

"You'll never do it," he quavered.

"Nonsense, of course I will, if you fellows carry out your part. It's nothing more than wall scaling, only we're doing it the other way round."

When all was ready Tubby was lying flat with his belt hooked through the iron staple. He had fast hold of Fred's ankles, while the latter's hands came just to the edge of the opening. Merritt was to form the last link in this human chain that was to rescue Rob Blake, if such a thing was possible.

Merritt had already seen that the bush to which Rob clung was not more than four feet below the opening. His daring plan was to lower himself,—with Fred clinging to his ankles, —till he could reach Rob's hands and help him up to

safety.

Without a word Merritt threw himself on his

stomach, after taking off his coat and hat, and wriggled to the edge. One look at Rob's upturned face told him that he had no time to lose. Seconds, yes, fractions of seconds, would count now.

"Catch hold, Fred!"

Fred gripped the daring Scout's ankles tightly.

"Now hang on like grim death."

Merritt clenched his teeth and slowly wriggled his way over the edge. Hanging head downward he extended his hands toward the shrub where Rob was clinging.

"Hold on for your lives!" he shouted to those above, and then to Rob:—

"Let go with one hand and grab my right wrist, Rob."

For an instant Rob hesitated. He dared not let go. But again came Merritt's voice. This time it was sharp and imperative.

"Let go and grab me!"

Rob's grip with his left was relaxed and he seized Merritt's

wrist, giving it a jerk that almost pulled his arm out of the socket. For an instant

'his heart was in his mouth. If the boys above weren't strong enough to hold them, they would both be dashed downward to the ground that looked so fearfully far below. But both Tubby and Fred were heavy youths, and then, too, the belt that was looped through that accommodating iron staple was an anchor in itself.

There was a slight give and a sag, but the "human chain" held.

"Now the other hand," ordered Merritt, drawing a breath of relief.

Rob obeyed instantly this time. But he was a fairly heavy youth and it was a good thing that he could take part of the weight off his rescuer's arms by digging his toes into the cracks of the ruinous tower. Otherwise this story might have had a different ending.

"Now, Rob, use me as a ladder. Don't look down for heaven's sake, but reach up and grab my belt. Use the cracks in the wall like the rungs of a ladder and clamber up."

"Let me rest a minute. I'm winded and dizzy," breathed Rob, whose nerve was badly shaken.

"Not a minute. Go on now!"

Merritt spoke sharply purposely. Rob rallied and did as he was told. He seized Merritt's belt as the other boy hung head downward, and, digging his toes into the cracks of the wall, he drew himself up till he could, with his other hand, lay hold of the edge of the opening. After this it was an easy matter, thanks to the ruinous condition of the wall which offered plenty of foothold, to clamber to safety. Reaching it, Rob lay back white and panting.

But in a few seconds he was able to help his chums haul the courageous Merritt out of danger.

It was some time before they felt able to leave the ruined tower, such a bad shaking up had all their nerves received; but at last a move was made. Needless to say, the Scout totems were not flung to the breeze that day.

"I don't see how we ever did it," exclaimed

Fred, as they reached the ground and Tubby began taking pictures of the tower while the others looked up at the spot where Rob had clung in such dire peril.

"I guess 'being prepared/ having good, healthy muscles and all that had a whole heap to do with it," said Tubby, snapping his shutter; "and now let's get a move on and get back to dinner, or second breakfast, as they call it here. I don't know how you fellows feel, but I'm one aching void."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE GATUN DAM.

The scene changes to a day when the boys had their first view of the mighty Gatun Dam, a work that, as President Taft said, is "as solid as the everlasting hills." Picture a vast valley hemmed in by hills heavily timbered with tropical growth. Across the valley floor the current of the muddy Chagres slowly serpentines, with workmen's huts clustered along its sides, and everywhere preparations being made to hem it in, much as the Liliputians set about harnessing Gulliver, a giant to them.

The floor of the valley, once a trackless jungle and destined within a short time from the moment that the Boy Scouts gazed upon it to become a mighty lake, was crisscrossed in every direction by lines of railroad along which contractors' engines were puffing and hauling long

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The boys had their first view of the mighty Gatun Dam.

winding trains of dirt cars. In places, great steam shovels were at work eating out whole hillsides, taking great mouthfuls at a time.

"Like Tubby eating pie," laughed Merritt, as he watched one of them.

Across the valley floor, the huge dam, a veritable mountain

of concrete, was rising. Busy human ants swarmed everywhere and, at the spot on which the boys stood, with Mr. Mainwaring and some assistant engineers to explain things, hundreds of black workmen were working like beavers on the summit of the great wall. Where they stood the wonderful dam was 100 feet wide, just one-fourth the length of the steamer on which they had come to the Isthmus.

At the base of the dam the width of the gigantic structure is 1,900 feet, and its massive foundations go down into the earth for many feet more.

"Just think," exclaimed Rob, aglow with the wonder of it all, "before long all this valley floor will be a huge inland sea across which vessels can push their way from Pedro Miguel to Gatun."

The roar of an excavating machine drowned his comrades' replies, but their looks showed how deeply they were impressed.

"It makes you feel like a—a fly speck," exclaimed Tubby, when the uproar ceased for an instant.

Up along a line of rails glided a movable steam shovel. On a side track a busy little locomotive had already bunted a train of flat cars. There was a loud clatter of chains; two white spouts of steam leaped high above the shelter which protected the steam shovel's engineer from the burning sun.

Down swung the huge steel dipper. Almost like a hungry human being, rather like some famished giant, it swung its iron-toothed jaws apart and bit deep into a bank which had to be moved. In an instant its mouth was closed again and the receptacle was full of rough, broken material. Big rocks were among the earth, but that made no difference to this devouring leviathan.

"Hi!" shouted a big shining negro man on the flat car.

The big steam shovel gave a sharp scream of warning, the steam spurted forth again from the vent pipes and up swung the load. The long arm slowly reached out above the flat car. A mighty scampering of the negro loaders followed.

"Hi !" came the cry of the boss negro again.

The bottom of the dipper opened. There was a roar of falling rock and earth and a flat car was filled. Then the process was repeated till the hillock that was to be removed melted away like a plate of ice cream before a healthy boy.

Thus, amid shouting, seeming confusion, the clanging and crash of metal, the scream of steam whistles, shouted orders and the noise of steam and the fog of smoke, the work went on,—the mighty job that Uncle Sam, contractor, is putting through for the benefit of the civilized world.

Mr. Mainwaring told the boys that there is keen rivalry

among the steam-shovel men. Prizes are given every month for the record

amount of dirt that flies. Each shovel is pushed to the limit of its capacity. In an eight-hour day one of the steam shovels excavated and loaded on flat cars 3,500 cubic yards. This means about 160 carloads for the day, or a carload every three minutes.

The boys noticed, too, that the negroes, Italians and Spaniards toiled away at their tasks without appearing to take much interest in their work beyond keeping just hard enough at it to avoid getting into trouble. But on the faces of the "gold-men," as the engineers and American officials are termed, was the stern determination of men animated by a great purpose. Off duty, the gold-men, so called because they are paid in American gold and not in Panama coinage, are a joking, jolly lot of men, who like to play tennis and baseball, and indulge in all sorts of sports. But on duty, clad in khaki and gaiters, with great sun helmets to keep off the baleful rays of the tropical sun, they are like changed men.

The expression the boys noticed on their faces

as they hurried about with blue prints or levels and theodolites was set and stern. They seemed to be, in a way, instruments of a great destiny. Each bore himself as if he

knew that the work in hand required the best that was in him.

"It seems to me," said Mr. Mainwaring, "that these great steam shovels and their crews, the activity and all the purposeful bustle and hustle down here, represent more fully than anything that I have ever seen the determined, fearless American spirit that has overridden what appeared to be impossibilities, and is carrying the Canal through to a triumphant completion. It's a great thing for a boy to be able to say that he has seen such a work, and it will be a still greater thing if he takes to heart the lessons to be learned here on every hand/'

Here he looked at Tubby who, not paying any attention to this "preachifying," as he mentallj termed it, was drinking the milk out of a cocoa-nut. The fat boy had become very fond of the cocoanut, which can be bought on the Isthmus

for little or nothing. He had slung several around his waist and at intervals, amidst the dust and turmoil of the work on the great dam, he refreshed himself by a copious draught of their cool contents.

At the boys' feet, as they stood on the lofty concrete battlement, lay the cut for the Gatun locks, which will raise and lower vessels eighty-five feet. There are no such locks anywhere in the world. While the boys watched, a steady Stream of concrete was being poured into giant moulds for the locks, and rows of arc-light poles, like gaunt trees,

showed that under the glare of electric lights the work was pushed forward even at night. Not a minute of time was wasted all through that vast system. They soon had become aware of that.

While the boys stood there an erect, military-looking man came up to Mr. Main war ing, who greeted him with every appearance of respect. The newcomer was tall, bore an air of authority, and was dressed in a white military uniform.

"Colonel," the boys heard Mr. Mainwaring say, after a few minutes' grave conversation, "I wish to introduce to you my son Fred and his three chums, —all, as you see, Boy Scouts."

Tubby hastened to chuck his empty cocoanut shell off the top of the dam as he saw that a social ceremony was going forward. The shell lit on a negro's skull far below and bounded off with a loud crack.

"Mah goodness, dem musquitoes is wusser dan ebber to-day," the negro remarked to the man shoveling at his side, which would have made Tubby laugh if he had heard it.

After a few kind words to the chums, the military-looking man passed on, stopping every now and then to examine the work with every appearance of minutest care.

"Wonder what kind of a boss he is?" remarked Tubby nonchalantly after he had passed on. "Steam shovel boss,

concrete boss, dynamite boss, engineering boss or surveying boss,—there are other kinds but I forget 'em."

"Why, you chump," roared Fred, "don't you know who that was ?"

"I didn't catch his name," rejoined Tubby.

"Well, that wasn't anybody more important than Lieut-Col. George W. Goethals, chairman of the Isthmian Canal Commission, and known as the 'man who dug the ditch."

"Oh-h-h-h-h-h!" mumbled Tubby, a great light breaking upon him, "I guess I'll take another cocoanut on that."

And the fat boy selected a fine specimen from the several that adorned his belt like scalps hanging round an Indian warrior.

CHAPTER XX.

A DYNAMITE VOLCANO.

After a while, despite the thrilling novelty of the scene and the significant interest it held for the four American lads, the dust, the heat, the noise and the confusion and bustle became wearisome, and they began looking about, boy like, for something new.

A white man in a duck uniform and pith helmet hastened by

in company with a colored man who looked different from any negro the boys had yet seen. The man had straight black hair, long and glossy. He wore a small sort of skull cap and white clothes with odd velvet shoes not unlike those affected by Chinese.

"Hullo, Raynor!" shouted Mr. Mainwaring to the white man, as the pair hustled by along the rampart-like heights of the big dam, "where are you bound for?"

The dark man and his companion came to a halt, the former standing in a respectful attitude and saluting Mr. Mainwaring.

"We're going to shoot a test hole," was the reply.

"Do you mind taking these lads along? As you see, they are Boy Scouts, and anxious to see all that they can."

"I'll be delighted to. I've a kid brother at home whose letters are full of the doings of his patrol. Come along, young men. I'll show you something that will make your eyes open."

"I'll meet you here in time for dinner," said Mr. Mainwaring.

"We'll be here," rejoined Tubby, whose eyes had brightened at the mention of a meal. Although he had devoured the milk and creamy meat of two huge cocoanuts, the stout youth was

still ready for another chance at edibles.

Mr. Raynor hastened on, beckoning to the boys to follow him.

'What is a test hole ?" asked Rob, as the boys trudged along the top of the dam beside him.

"It is a hole blown in the ground so that we can tell what sort of foundation we are working on," was the reply.

"Blown in the ground?" asked Tubby with round inquiring eyes.

"Yes. Dynamited, perhaps I should have said. Ram Chunda there," he motioned back at the dark man who was trotting along behind, "is the boss dynamiter. He's going to shoot the hole."

"Oh, he's a Hindoo?" exclaimed Rob as he heard the name of the dark satellite. "We thought he was a negro."

"Oh, no. We couldn't trust negroes with dynamite. Almost all the dynamite men on the canal are Hindoos. They are not fit for the heavy work; but we find them reliable and trustworthy around explosives."

"What's that?" asked Merritt presently, indicating a small hut painted a bright red.

"That's a dynamite hut. See, there are sev-

 eral workmen waiting to have explosives served out to them."

"Can anybody get the stuff who wants it?'* asked Merritt.

"No, indeed. That would never do. They have to bring an order signed by the boss on their particular section."

Ram Chunda, however, appeared to have his supply of explosives elsewhere for they did not stop at the dynamite hut but passed on.

"How much dynamite is stored there?" asked Rob, as they hurried along.

"Oh, enough to blow the whole dam up, I guess," was the careless reply, to which the boys did not attach much significance at the time, although they were to recollect those words with peculiar vividness later.

Before long they reached a place where ladders were stretched from the ground to the top of the dam.

"We'll go down these," announced Mr. Ray-

nor, halting. "Ram, you go first. You boys can follow. All got steady heads, I hope ?"

"I think so," murmured Fred, with a vivid recollection in his mind of the scene on the ruined tower of St. Augustin, "two of us have, anyhow."

The engineer did not, of course, understand the allusion nor, to the joy of Rob and Merritt, did he ask any explanation. Neither boy liked to recall those awful moments when they hung suspended in mid-air between life and death.

The ladders were long and steep, but the descent was made without incident. At the base of the dam, however, was a steep sort of embankment of loose sand and gravel. Tubby, who was behind Ram Chunda, looked down and saw this, which appeared to offer a secure "jumping off" place.

With a whoop he jumped from the last ladder while still several feet above the top of the bank. His feet struck it with a scrunch. But the loose, shaly stuff was treacherous. With an alarmed the fat boy, the cocoanuts round his belt rat-

tling like castanets, rolled down the bank, revolving like a barrel.

The others looked on in some alarm. Suddenly Tubby struck the bottom of the bank and simultaneously there came a series of sounds like a volley of musketry.

Pop! pop! pop! pop!

"Gracious, it's Tubby," cried Rob, tracing the source of the

sounds.

"Is he blowing up ?" demanded Fred Mainwar-ing in genuine alarm.

"Sounds like it!" exclaimed Merritt apprehensively.

The engineer and the Hindoo looked on in amazement. The fat boy continued to pop loudly. Suddenly, still popping spasmodically, he struggled to his feet. What a sight he presented!

He was covered from head to foot with a milky fluid which was flowing down him and on which the gravel had stuck and plastered him with yellow mud.

"Tubby, are you hurt?" yelled Merritt.

"Bob," shrilled Rob, for once, in his alarm, giving Tubby his real first name, "what's the trouble ? Are you injured ?"

"No, but those cocoanuts have blown up!" shouted Tubby angrily. "One after another they busted! I thought I was in a battle for a minute."

"Well, you look as if you'd been through a hard siege," declared Rob, who, now that his apprehension was over, joined the others in a hearty laugh and a scramble down the gravel bank.

"What made 'em bust ?" demanded Tubby, ruefully, surveying his drenched uniform and brushing himself off as best he could.

As soon as he could speak for laughing the engineer explained. Cocoanuts in their natural state are shielded by great masses of leaves which keep their milky contents cool. Tubby, in his greed, had girded himself about with the succulent nuts and then spent a long morning in the hot sun. This, combined with his activities, had caused the milk to heat up and ferment.

If the fat boy had not taken his tumble down the bank it is not likely that the nuts would have exploded. But the fall was what proved too much for the already fermented milk. Like so much gunpowder it had expanded and blown the "eyes," or thin parts, out of each cocoanut, spraying the unfortunate Tubby with milk, and making the sharp series of reports that had so alarmed them.

Even Ram Chunda's immobile face bore the trace of a smile at Tubby's disaster. In fact, the boy got no sympathy from anyone.

"I'll pack no more cocoanuts with me," he was heard to mutter, "they are as dangerous as Anarchists' bombs and a whole lot messier. Gee, my uniform's a sight!"

But as the unanimous verdict seemed to be "Serves you right," Tubby had few remarks on his disaster to offer for the public benefit.

CHAPTER XXI. "RUN FOR YOUR LIVES!"

Ram Chunda approached a small hut painted red like the other dynamite shed, and came out with his arms laden with what were apparently cylindrical tin cans. He selected a number of these, handling them with no more apparent care than if they had been tins of tomatoes, instead of charges of dynamite.

"T-t-t-tell him to be a little c-c-c-careful, won't you?" begged Tubby. "That stuff would blow up worse than cocoanuts if he dropped it."

"Yes, we'd never know what struck us," said the engineer carelessly, "but don't worry about Ram, he knows what he's doing."

He spoke with the indifference of one who has handled high explosives for years, but the boys' emotions were very different. They eyed

Ram Chunda askance as he stumbled occasionally

on a rock or hillock of earth.

In this manner they walked quite a distance back from the

dam to a point where no tracks or workmen were visible.

"Right here is where, before long, we are going to build a wing dam to strengthen the main one," explained the engineer.

"Then what's the use of blowing it up?" asked Tubby stolidly. The fat boy was, to tell the truth, in a state of alarm over what was to come.

"Why, we want to see just what lies underneath before we start to dig a foundation, otherwise it would be so much wasted labor," was the response.

There were already several test holes drilled in the ground, but the object of dynamiting was to loosen up the soil beneath to ascertain if there was any substratum of water.

"Ever see them shoot an oil well?" asked the engineer, as he peered about looking for a suitable hole to start out

The boys shook their heads. They had heard of the operation but had never had an opportunity to witness such a proceeding.

"Now is your chance then," said Mr. Raynor. "Ram," calling to the Hindoo, "we try 'um this fellow number one shot."

The Hindoo nodded and, carrying his armful of explosives, hurried to his boss's side.

"Gee! This is only Number One," muttered Tubby in an alarmed undertone.

"Don't be a scare-cat, Tubby," laughed Mer-ritt, although his own heart was beating a bit fast.

"Scare-cat nothing. I —I guess I'll go home to dinner. Once is quite enough to be blown up in one morning," quoth the fat youth, "besides, I promised my mother I wouldn't get into danger."

"I guess over-eating is the only danger you'll be in," chortled Fred.

Tubby looked pained but said nothing. With round eyes he began to watch the proceedings of the Hindoo "dynamite man."

The latter cautiously lowered into the hole selected several of his tin cylinders. The rest of the operation, as Mr. Raynor had explained, would be similar to that of shooting an oil well. That is to say, a heavy cylindrical iron weight would be dropped on the explosive mass at the bottom of the hole, causing it to detonate.

With as much care now as if he were handling eggs, Ram lowered the final cylinder of dynamite into the hole. Then he attached a long string to the weight and gave a shout.

"Get back to a safe distance, boys," cried Mr. Raynor,

running toward them.

They needed no second warning, but beat a rapid retreat toward the great concrete rampart of the dam.

"I'd climb over to the other side if I had the time," Tubby declared, feeling perhaps that he would be safe enough behind that man-made cliff.

At last all was in readiness. Some laborers near at hand, glad of any excuse to drop work, laid down their shovels to see what would happen

when the "Go-devil," as they called it, was set off.

Mr. Raynor gave a look behind him at Ram who was crouching low at quite a distance from the hole.

"All right!" he shouted.

Ram gave the string a jerk and dropped it. Then he too started sprinting toward the boys.

"He's dropped it!" exclaimed Mr. Raynor. "Watch it now!"

It seemed to the boys as if Ram, swiftly as he ran, would never get to a place of safety. Their hearts fairly stood in their mouths as they watched him running like a greyhound.

Suddenly came a subdued roar. The earth shook. The solid

ground trembled as if it had been a jelly. A second later, from the mouth of the hole there shot a mighty column of earth, stones and smoke. It was accompanied by a screaming, whistling sound and then came the detonation of a mighty roar. Up and up shot the column as if it meant to pierce the blue sky.

The workmen shouted and ran for places of

safety.

Suddenly Mr. Raynor, who had been watching with hawk-like eyes, gave a sharp, commanding cry:

"Run, boys! Run for your lives! After me!"

For an instant they hesitated. Why should they run? There appeared to be no danger. At the distance that they were from the spouting column it did not appear possible that they would be in jeopardy from it even when it collapsed and came crashing to earth.

"What's the matter?" cried Rob.

"Don't stop to ask questions. Run! Run! Run, I tell you!" roared the engineer.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE BOYS MEET AN OI,D ACQUAINTANCE.

The boys needed no further urging. Taking to their heels they ran like so many scared jack-rabbits after the engineer. Tubby, his fat, stumpy legs working like piston rods, was in the lead.

"I knew something was going to bust," he yelled, as he sprinted along, "and it has!"

Suddenly Mr. Raynor, who was heading apparently for a piled-up mass of rocks, stopped and glanced back.

"Too late! Duck!" he shouted the next instant.

Down flopped the boys, but as they threw themselves face downward they felt as if they were being lifted from the ground by a giant hand and then slammed down again. It seemed

almost as if a heavy weight had been hurled down on them.

Then came a terrific, blasting roar and blinding flash as if a huge gun had been set off quite close to them.

The fearful concussion and their lack of knowledge of what was happening scared and shocked them half out of their wits. Gravel and small rocks fell about them. If it had not been for their broad-brimmed Scout hats, which protected the back of their heads, they would have been cut and

bruised by the hail of debris.

"You can get up now," came Mr. Raynor's voice presently, "but I don't mind saying that that was about as narrow a squeak as I've ever experienced."

"It sure was a test hole," muttered Tubby; "it tested me all right and I don't want any more of it."

"What on earth happened?" demanded Rob, brushing dirt and dust from his uniform.

"That's what I'd like to know," said Fred.

"I thought the world was coming to an end," declared Merritt.

"Or a giant cocoanut was blowing up," murmured Tubby.

At that moment Ram came running up. He looked embarrassed and dabbed at a small cut on his forehead with a handkerchief.

"Him hurte you?" he asked rather anxiously, looking askance at Mr. Raynor.

"More good luck than thanks to you that we were not all killed," declared the engineer angrily. "What made you do it, you rascal?"

"Me very sorry. Ram forget," said the man contritely.

But his repentance had no effect on the thoroughly angry engineer. He told the man that he was too grossly careless to work on the dynamite gang and ordered him to report at his office that night and be assigned to some other work.

Tubby nodded sagely as he heard this. He was confirmed, it seemed, in his opinion that the man

had been careless and he felt like telling the

engineer so. But Rob asked a question.

"You haven't told us yet just what it was that happened?" he said.

"Yes, what was it?" put in Fred.

"Oh, nothing to speak of but an explosion of fifteen pounds of dynamite about as close to us as I'd care to have such a thing happen," said the engineer grimly.

"Gee whiz! As bad as that!" exclaimed Mer-ritt looking aghast. "Why we might all have been "

"Hoisted sky-high. Oh, you don't need to tell me that. That careless fellow Ram left one of his cans of dynamite lying on the ground not far from the test hole. I didn't notice it and he didn't either, I guess, till he shot the well. Then just as that

column of stones and stuff was sky-hooting up, I happened to see that can lying there. It gave me a turn, I tell you. I figured out what would happen if a rock ever hit and we standing where we were."

"What would have happened?" asked Tubby innocently, his eyes like two saucers.

"Happened! Why we'd all have had through tickets to Kingdom Come, that's what would have happened."

"But you haven't told it all," exclaimed Rob, who had just comprehended something. "Boys, that weight that fell on us was Mr. Raynor's body. He just shoved us in front of him and shielded us with his own body. He saved our lives."

"That's what I call being a real hero," cried Fred.

"Three cheers and a tiger for Mr. Raynor!" yelled Merritt.

"Pshaw! You drop that now!" protested the engineer. "I just fell on you because I couldn't help it, I reckon."

"We know better than that, don't we, fellows ?" cried Rob.

"You bet we do," was the response given with cleep conviction and unanimity.

"Well, say no more about it," begged the engineer. "I promised to take good care of you and I was almost

responsible for getting you injured, so I guess we're quits."

As Mr. Raynor had to visit other parts of the workings, and also to take samples of the earth blown up by Ram's unlucky blast, the boys bade him good-bye soon after.

"Well, so long," he said. "I hope you'll drop in and see me some time if you are going to be about here long. I may have something else interesting to show you."

The boys said they would. Then up came Ram Chunda, grinning like a monkey.

"Me velly solly," he said, "white sahib no be mad. You come see me some time, eh?"

"Yes, we'll come and see you when you're in your little casket or else get our lives insured first, you—you anarchist you!" sputtered Tubby.

The engineer had advised them not to climb the ladders but to walk along the foot of the dam till they reached a place where a flight of

steps had been moulded in the concrete. Accordingly, after leaving him they trudged along at the foot of the gigantic stone cliff, looking up every now and then to marvel at its height and massiveness.

They found plenty to look at and were in no hurry. That is,

none of them was in a hurry but Tubby, who was keen to find out if it was not time to go back to Mr. Mainwaring's bungalow for dinner.

It was hot work walking, and they paused frequently. At length they came to a place where a small tree at the foot of the dam afforded a patch of shade.

"Let's sit down and rest a while," said Fred. "I'm tuckered out."

"Wish this was a cocoanut tree," said Tubby as they reclined in the grateful bit of shade. "I'd climb it and get all you fellows something to eat."

"Or blow us up," laughed Fred mischievously.

"Say, fellows," said Rob presently, "look up

above us on the top of the dam. There's a big

concrete mixing machine up there."

"Hope they don't drop anything down on us/' said Fred apprehensively.

"Not much danger of that, I just saw a man peeking down at us. They would warn us if we were in danger."

"I don't know, those niggers are none too careful. Remember

that fellow Ram; he came pretty near ramming us," punned Fred.

"Look out!" yelled Merritt suddenly.

But he was too late. A bucket full of liquid cement came spattering down on them, going all over their uniforms and making them sad sights indeed. Luckily the stuff was almost as thin as water or they might have been injured.

Rob looked up and gave an indignant shout A mocking face peered over the edge of the parapet and grinned jeeringly at him. As he saw this countenance Rob gave a violent start and fairly staggered backward.

It was the face of Jared Applegate into whicK

fie had looked. It was his hand that had thrown the bucket of liquid cement over them, ruining their uniforms.

"Fellows!" shouted Rob in high excitement.

But Jarcd's face had vanished as swiftly as H had appeared.

t32 THE BOY SCOUTS

CHAPTER XXIII.

ALONG THE: CHAGRES.

"Well, did you ever ! ! Jared of all people !" "What on earth is he doing here?" "That's plain enough," was Rob's reply to the last exclamation, which had proceeded from Tubby following Rob's hasty recital of what he had seen on the top of the dam.

"That's plain enough," he repeated. "Jared is a pretty slick sort of article, or, at any rate, the men with whom he is in league are cunning and clever. What better place could Jared be, watched as he is, than holding down a job as a canal worker, bossing some small undertaking? Who would ever dream of looking for him in such a position?"

"That's so," agreed Fred, "and then, too, he gets a chance to survey the ground thoroughly and lay plans for whatever sort of deviltry that

gang is up to. Maybe Alverado and Estrada are working on menial jobs, too, with the same end in view."

"Quite likely," replied Rob, "and also that mysterious chap we've seen with Jared on several occasions. Anyhow, our duty now is plain enough. We must make all haste back to Mr. Mainwaring and report to him what we have discovered."

"Let's get some of this mess cleaned off us first," said the practical Merritt. "We look more like drowned rats than Scouts, in our present plight."

The boys set to work trying to remove the traces of the ducking that had been given them by the malignant Jared, who had undoubtedly recognized them. Had they known that he was actually on the lookout for them, they would have been much astonished. Yet such was the case, as will appear before long.

Luckily the mixture of cement that had been doused over them was a very watery one, the

rinsings of a cement bucket, in fact, so that in a short time the hot sun had dried out most of the traces of their adventure.

But Mr. Mainwaring greeted them with exclamations of astonishment.

"What in the world have you lads been up to now," he exclaimed half laughingly as they rejoined him, "taking a swim with your uniforms on?"

"Well, we did have an involuntary bath," admitted Rob, and he went on to tell just what had happened.

"Jove!" exclaimed Mr. Mainwaring when he had finished, "this is getting interesting, and perhaps explains many annoying things that have been happening about here recently. Derrick booms have collapsed without apparent cause and an investigation has shown that acid has been poured on the supporting ropes by some malignantly

disposed persons. Blasts have been set off prematurely, narrowly avoiding injury, and the work has been delayed by many such

tricks. It wouldn't surprise me a bit if your friend Jared and the Latin Americans who are interested in delaying the canal construction are at the bottom of this. I'll dispatch men at once to get hold of this chap Jared and we'll make him confess all about it."

As he spoke there was a sudden crash behind him as a workman, who had been standing close to him and who must have overheard every word, dropped a heavy bucket. They all faced round and saw a man shuffling off rapidly. Something familiar about him struck Rob, but for the life of him he could not place the man. It was not until later that he recalled where they had seen him before. He was the man who had driven them to the ruins of old Panama on that memorable morning, and who must have heard some of their talk. But what was he doing on the canal work? Was he allied with the forces that were trying to defeat the completion of the canal? Had he told the plotters of what he had over-

heard and warned them that vigilant retribution

was on their trail?

All these were questions that for the time had to wait. Rob

decided not to say anything just then. After all he might have been mistaken. In the nmntime the searchers sent out after Jared reported that they could not find him. Undoubtedly after venting his malice on the boys he had made off. Rob was not mistaken in his identification of the cabman. The fellow was allied with the plotters by close ties both of nationality and sentiment. He had been set to driving a hack in Panama so that he might carry on his spy work without being suspected. It was by chance that the boys had happened to take his cab. But what he had overheard that day had caused him to hasten to the dam and inform his confederates, who, as Rob had guessed, were constantly about there disguised as workmen.

In that vast enterprise, employing thousands of laborers, it was a simple enougfi matter for

any able bodied men to obtain employment, and no questions were asked so long as the laborer proved able to earn his pay. At dinner time Mr. Mainwaring was unusually silent. There was no question in his mind now but that there were plotters mingled in among the workmen. That night orders for extra vigilance in patroling the dam were issued, and that night, also, Mr. Main-waring announced that he intended to start the next day on his search for the troublesome tributary of the Chagres River which it was his intention to devise a means to control.

As may be imagined, this was great news to the boys, and

they passed an all but sleepless night in their room in Mr. Mainwaring'^ bungalow, which stood in a row of "gold-men's" houses, among which it was the largest and best finished.

The boys' equipment had been brought up from Panama with them and was, as usual, all in readiness for instant transportation. These Boy Scouts lived up to their "Be Prepared" motto all the time, and to the finest detail. Wh«tt

their camping equipment had been packed up on the submarine island everything had been stowed away with military precision so that they knew, without going through a lot of troublesome overhauling, that everything, down to their small pocket water filters, was in its right place.

A wagon transported their goods and chattels to the landing place on the Chagres the next morning, right after an early breakfast. Mr. Raynor was to accompany his chief in the capacity of assistant, and the surveying instruments and other paraphernalia almost filled one of the odd native canoes they were to use. Another canoe held the camping outfits. But they were not to paddle their way laboriously up the swiftly flowing river.

To the delight of the boys a light draught launch, fitted with powerful engines and a spidery stern paddle wheel, was to do the towing while they took it easy. This suited Tubby down to the ground, and Rob's cup of satisfaction was full to

the brim when he learned that he and

Merritt were to alternate as engineers. As we know, both boys were familiar with the management of gasolene engines, and they gazed with approval at the fourteen horse-power, twin-cylinder engine of the Pathfinder, as the launch was called.

Before they left, the chief of the Gatun Guards, as the police that watched the big dam Were called, reported to Mr. Mainwaring that nothing suspicious had occurred during the night and also that no trace could be found of the men wanted. This was disappointing, but the boys were so keyed up with the expectation of the wonders that awaited them in the tropical forests through which the Chagres wound its way on its higher reaches, that they gave but scant thought to Jared and the plotters.

At last all was in readiness; Mr. Mainwaring, who had the steering wheel, gave the signal to start the engines.

Rob gave the big fly-wheel a twist against the compression, while Merritt turned on the gaso-

lene and set the spark. The engine gave a chug and a snort and the big stern paddle wheel, which gave the boat such an odd look but was necessary for shoal water navigation, began to beat the water.

The boys gave a shout and their patrol cries. From the bow of the Pathfinder, as a compliment to them, fluttered the pennants of the Eagles and the Black Wolves, the same which it had been designed to plant at old Panama. At the stern waved Old Glory. Astern towed the two dugouts, loaded deep down with "duffle."

Thus started a trip that was to prove one of the most adventurous that lads ever embarked upon "by flood or field."

CHAPTER XXIV. THE TRACKLESS JUNGLE.

As they slowly ascended the sluggish, though powerful current of the muddy Chagres, Mr. Raynor told them something about the object of their expedition. In the foothills of the Cordillero de Bando, a sort of backbone of mountains extending throughout the length of the Isthmus, many small rivers rise, some of which feed the Chagres and contribute to its floods. The largest of these, a stream known as the Rio Chepalto, was, in the rainy season, quite a formidable torrent. Mr. Mainwaring's idea was to construct a dam or dig some sort of a connecting link which would divert the waters of the Chepalto in flood time into one of the small rivers that flowed seaward, thus further taming the Chagres.

The Gatun valley was soon left behind and

the Chagres plunged into a steaming, luxuriant forest. Between banks overgrown in wild profusion with every sort of tropical growth, its chocolate colored current flowed silently along. In places, muddy bayous led off from the main stream and these, the boys were told, were the haunts of crocodiles and alligators.

Everywhere amidst the luxuriant tangle on the banks were vivid splashes of color, scarlet, yellow, and blue. These were the flowers of a score of varieties of tropic shrubs and flowering bushes. They filled the air with a rank, sweet smell that was almost overpowering. From the tangle, too, there shot up majestic trees, from whose branches drooped long lianas, or creepers, some of them thick as a man's thigh. Here was a clump of brilliantly green and feathery bamboo, there shot up a grove of coco-bola trees, while once in a while, but this rarely, there loomed in sight a group of the kings of the tropical forests —a majestic gathering of towering mahogany trees.

There were also clumps of banana plants growing to a height of fifteen or twenty feet, with immense broad leaves often six feet in length. Curiously enough, the banana bunches appeared to be hanging upside down. Beyond the fruit extended a stem like a snake, ending in a big blossom something like a red-brown water lily. There were occasional clumps of cocoanut trees, too, at which Tubby looked with a strange mixture of awe and longing.

Occasionally, through all this brilliant jungle gaily colored parrots or a flock of screaming macaws would fly, alarmed by the chugging of the launch. In some of the bayous, pelicans or big blue herons stood like sentinels on one leg, watching the progress of the invaders. But, beautiful as it all was, the boys missed the songs of the woodland birds in the north. Except for the shrieking of the parrots and macaws, or the occasional sullen splash of some unseen creature plunging into the river, the vast forests that reached for miles all about them were silent.

Suddenly the launch came to a stop with a soft bump. The boys looked rather alarmed. Had they collided with some huge creature that made its home in the tepid waters of the Chagres? They were soon relieved of any anxiety on that score.

"Well, we're aground at last," remarked Mr. Mainwaring in a matter-of-fact tone.

"You talk as if you had expected such a thing to happen/' said Rob in some surprise.

"Yes indeed," rejoined the engineer, "in fact, I'm astonished that it didn't happen before. The river is full of sand banks, and sometimes it is impossible to see the channel. I see you've got the engine stopped already. You had better reverse now and we'll soon get off again."

"I should think that it would be quicker to go through the forests," remarked Rob, when without much trouble they "got going" again.

"It would be almost twice as quick, but nobody knows the paths but the Indians."

"Indians!" exclaimed Tubby. "Are there Indians here?"

He clutched his rifle with a determined look, for of course the boys had brought their weapons along.

"Yes indeed, plenty of them, but I guess we won't see any. They are the San Bias tribe and so small as to be almost pigmies."

"I know, I've seen pictures of them," cried Rob. "They look something like Japs only they've got big round heads and long, straight black hair."

"That's it," rejoined Mr. Mainwaring; "they're harmless enough unless their particular territory is invaded. No white man has ever penetrated far into their country and come back to tell the tale. But they say that back among the forests and mountains to which they alone know the way are deposits of emerald and gold of priceless value."

"I should think somebody would form an expedition and raid the place," said Tubby in a war-like manner.

"More easily said than done," Mr. Raynor struck in; "it's been tried, but fever and poisoned arrows wiped out all but a few poor, half-crazed wretches who struggled back to civilization more dead than alive."

"Do they ever come down to this part of the country?" asked Merritt.

"Only occasionally, when a hunting expedition has led them far afield," rejoined Mr. Mainwar-ing. "This Rio Chepalto that we are going to try to diverge runs back into their country; but where it joins the Chagres is not forbidden ground. Their territory begins higher up."

Suddenly there came another soft bump.

"Aground again!" cried Rob, stopping the engine. "Shall I reverse?"

"Yes; do so at once," was the order.

But this time the matter of getting off the sand bank was not so simple. The two tow ropes attached to the canoe became entangled in the paddle wheel as the Pathfinder backed up, and they came to a stop. An investigation showed

that it might take some time to get it free. Tubby was prompt in asking permission to go into the forest to see if he couldn't bring down some game of some kind.

"You and Fred will have to go alone then," said Mr. Mainwaring, "and don't go far from the river. We'll recall you by three blasts on the whistle. Rob and Merritt will be needed to help us get untangled and to work the engine."

"Never mind, we'll bring back some game that will make their eyes bulge," declared Tubby valiantly. "Come on, Fred."

"Wait till I shove the landing plank ashore," said Fred, catching hold of a plank that was used for that purpose. The launch lay quite close to the shore and the plank, which was ten feet long, was of sufficient length to form a bridge.

"Never mind the plank," quoth Tubby, "I'll just step on this old log here and "

"Look out, boy!" came a sharp cry from Mr. Raynor.

But it was too late. Tubby had already stepped

over the side of the launch. As his foot touched the log a surprising thing happened. What had seemed a balk of old rotten timber gave a leap that threw Tubby into the water, and at the same instant a vast pair of jaws, armed with double rows of gleaming teeth, flashed wide open. The alligator—for that was what Tubby's "log" was—gave a menacing, hissing sound and a flourish of its formidable tail.

The next instant a rifle cracked sharply. The creature gave a

roar as a bullet crashed down its open throat. Rob, seeing Tubby's peril, had snatched Fred's rifle from him and pumped a bullet into the monster reptile where it would do the most good. He pumped the repeating mechanism and two more bullets drove into the 'gator before it sank, crimsoning the muddy water. They saw no more of it and Mr. Mainwaring declared that Rob must have killed it.

Tubby, up to his waist in water, gasped as he beheld his narrow escape and Rob's prompt action.

"Ge,e whiz! This is a funny country," he mumbled, after he had been lectured for his carelessness. "Cocoanuts explode and old rotten logs turn into alligators."

On his promise to be careful and keep well within call, Tubby was allowed to go on shore with Fred and you may be sure he used the landing plank this time. The two boys struck off straight into the jungle and then kept a course that lay parallel to the river bank. All at once Tubby gave a violent exclamation and almost fell over backward. A lizard, but a lizard almost as big as himself, had run through the jungle right in front of him.

"A Panama water-lizard," declared Fred, who had put in more time studying the country from books than had Tubby. "It's harmless."

"It doesn't look so," was Tubby's comment.

But a more thrilling encounter lay just ahead of them. Hanging from a tree, and slowly swaying to and fro, was what looked like a beautifully marked liana or hanging creeper.

"Oh, what a beauty," exclaimed Fred, stepping forward, but the next instant he recoiled with a yell of alarm.

The creeper had emitted a loud, angry hiss and then they saw that it was no creeper at all, but a brilliantly colored snake, at least fifteen feet long, that was swinging from a limb around which its tail was coiled. Tubby echoed Fred's yell of alarm and the next instant both boys tool? to their heels in mad flight. The serpent had swiftly and silently begun writhing its way to the ground.

"Run for your life!" cried Tubby wildly. "He's after us."

Stumbling over creepers, falling headlong, and then struggling to their feet again, and keeping on with their mad rush, the two terrified boys ran for their lives. Behind them came a thrashing sound as the big snake made its way after them.

In their alarm they lost all sense of direction or distance. All they knew was that the big

reptile was pursuing them, and they raced along without considering anything but escaping from it. It never even

occurred to them to open fire on it with their rifles.

How far they ran they had no idea. All they knew was that at last, when, from sheer exhaustion they paused, there was no sound of pursuit. The vast woods were silent. All at once they had a fresh fright. This time from overhead. There was a mighty commotion in the tree-tops accompanied by shrill barks and cries.

"Gracious, what's coming now?" gasped Tubby. "I wish we were back on the launch!"

But it was only a troop of white-faced, long-tailed monkeys swinging by, traveling along the tree-top high road at almost incredible speed. They paused as they saw the boys standing there below them. Gathering together they began to chatter and make a terrible noise.

Then, making horrible grimaces and yelling angrily, they broke off sticks and began to pelt the two lads furiously with them. Suddenly

Tubby raised his rifle and fired at them. Instantly they made off, shrieking at the top of their voices and swinging from limb to limb by means of their long tails which they used as conveniently as hands.

The monkeys gone with their bewildering chatter, the boys began to look about them. They were standing in a spot

where the undergrowth was not so dense, but they could see that they were in the depths of the forest. As they looked around them the same thought clutched uncomfortably hard at the heart of each. How far had they come on their wild run to escape the great serpent? Also, in what direction had their retreat led them? Tubby was the first to give these disquieting thoughts words.

"Where are we, Fred?"

"I—I don't know. Haven't you got your compass?"

"Yes, but I didn't take any bearings when we left the river."

"Let's strike out and try to get back. At any rate we'll hear the whistle before long."

"That's so. I forgot that. Better sit down here and wait till we hear it, then. No use wandering about, we might go in a wrong direction."

But had the boys known it, the launch whistle, not a very powerful one, was at that very minute blowing repeatedly for them. Their wild dash to escape from the huge snake had carried them far into the jungle.

They sat there for a long time, each busied with his own thoughts. At last Tubby rose.

"It's funny we don't hear that whistle, Fred," he said, "but I've

been thinking that maybe we ran further than we thought from that beast in the tree. Now I'm pretty sure the river lies that way," he pointed in a directly opposite direction. "Let's strike out for it."

"All right," agreed Fred, whose face had begun to assume an alarmed look. "S-s-s-s-say, Tubby, you don't think we're lost, do you?"

Tubby was quick to note the quaver in Fred's voice, and he bravely put on a careless air.

"Lost! Not a bit of it. Two Boy Scouts lost in a bit of timber like this? Not much. Come on, old chap, and we'll be laughing over our scare within an hour's time."

But hour after hour went by and still the two lads, now thoroughly scared, though neither had yet admitted it, plunged along through the jungle. At last when they reached a small open space, Fred could stand it no longer. He sank down on a fallen tree trunk and fairly gave way to his fears.

"We're lost, Tubby," he moaned, "and it's no use going any further. I can't, in fact I'm dead tired out. What on earth shall we do ?"

The fat boy looked at his comrade "with alarmed eyes. It was plain that Fred was on the verge of a nervous collapse. Their position was bad enough without that. And yet Tubby

could find no words to comfort his companion. What Fred had said was the truth; they were lost in the

trackless jungle, a terrifying situation indeed. From time to time during their wanderings they had fired their rifles, hoping to hear some response, but none had come.

Tubby, however, had, whenever possible, marked the trail either by barking or blazing a tree with his knife in Indian fashion, or by leaving grass and stone signs in a manner familiar to all first-class Scouts. This was now the only crumb of comfort he could offer to Fred.

"Cheer up. Maybe they'll pick up the trail," he said as hopefully as he could.

"But if they don't, we—gracious! Look there!"

Facing the two lost boys was a party of squat r copper-colored little men with big round heads and straight black hair. They carried bows and arrows and spears. Their clothes consisted of old sacking, bits of cloth, anything in fact that would partially cover them. They evidently formed a hunting party, for some of them carried wild pigs and one or two had a deer slung on

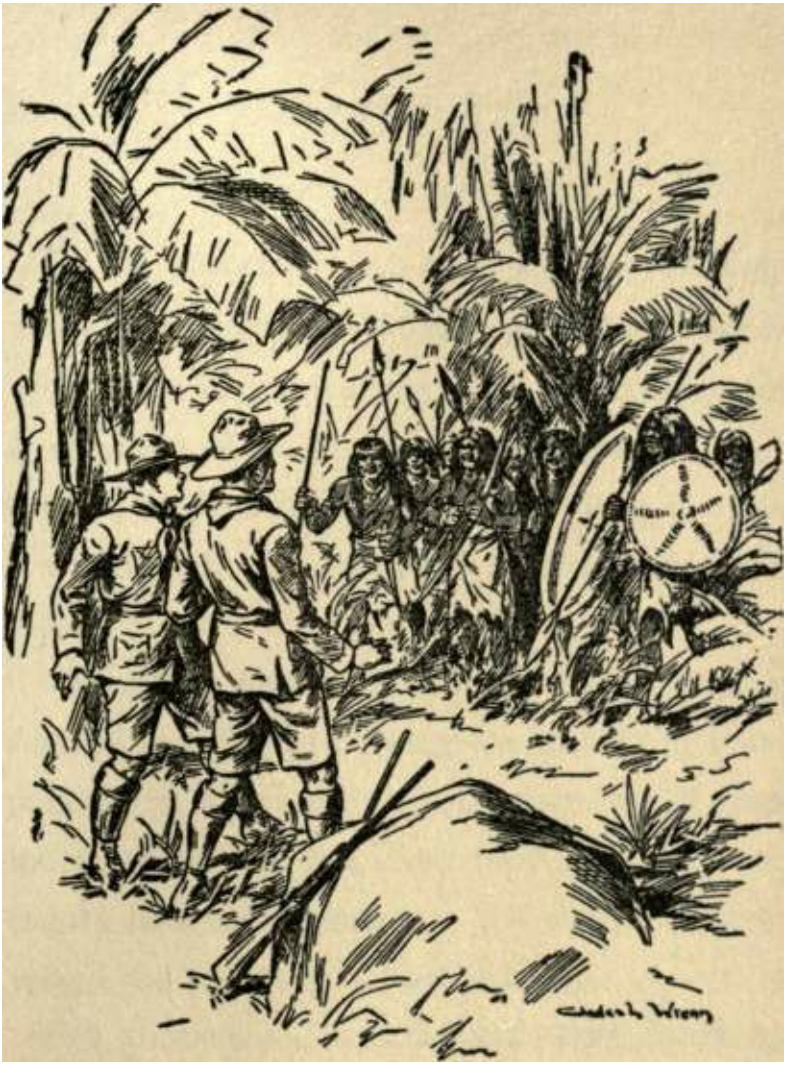
a branch between them. They had crept up quite

silently and now regarded the interlopers intently.

For an instant the two white boys stood stock-still, as if turned to stone. Then by a natural impulse, they turned and started to run. But a spear whizzed through the air after them, transfixing itself quivering in a tree just above their heads.

This brought them to a halt. Weapons they had none, for when they paused they had laid down their rifles and in their precipitate, startled flight had forgotten to pick them up again.

Utterly unnerved by this added sheaf to their bundle of misfortunes, the two Boy Scouts stood facing the Indians who, they had no doubt, formed a hunting or scouting party sent out by the San Bias tribes that made their homes back in the mysterious recesses of the mountains where rose the headwaters of the Chepalta.



For an instant the two white boys stooH stock-still, as It turned to stone.— Page 256.

CHAPTER XXV.

A CHAPTER OF ACCIDENTS.

In the meantime Rob and Merritt, working waist deep in the muddy shallows, had succeeded, after some rather arduous work, in clearing the stern wheel of its entangling rope. The line had become twisted in and out of the shaft in such a way that it was necessary in places to cut it loose.

When this had been done, Mr. Mainwaring decided that before blowing the whistle to summon back the young hunters they would give the machinery a test. Accordingly, when the canoes had been secured to the shore, Rob reversed the engine and started it up.

For a moment it whirled and chugged away, straining to back the launch off the muddy shallows in which she had grounded. The lightly built craft trembled under the effort. The en-

gine snorted and puffed as more power was applied.

"Hooray! We're afloat once more!" cried Merritt triumphantly, as the launch was caught in the current and swung free. But at the same instant came an ominous cracking sound. The engine raced wildly and then stopped as Rob shut off the power.

"What's the matter now?" cried Mr. Raynor apprehensively,

as the launch began to drift downstream in a helpless way.

"Wait a minute. I'll see," cried Rob, and then the next instant, "The driving chain has snapped!"

"Throw out the anchor before we drift any more," cried Mr. Mainwaring.

This was done and then Rob set about making an investigation. As he had declared, the driving chain, which drove the stern wheel just as a bicycle sprocket is revolved, had parted in the middle. Undoubtedly the strain that had been

placed on it when they were backing the launch off had proved too much for its strength.

They regarded the accident with some dismay.

"Great Scotland! That means we are stuck," exclaimed Merritt.

"Unquestionably, unless we can make some repairs," admitted Mr. Mainwaring.

"Do you think you can fix it, Rob ?" asked Mr. Raynor.

"I might manage to make a temporary link out of wire," replied Rob, "but I'm afraid it wouldn't hold long against the current."

"Isn't there a spare chain in the tool locker?" asked Merritt.

Mr. Mainwaring shook his head.

"There's nothing for it but to turn back and get a new link forged," he said. "Too bad!"

"It is indeed," agreed Rob. "Shall I make a link out of steel wire? I guess that would be strong enough to carry us down with the stream if we go slowly.

"Yes, do so," was the reply. "Merritt, will

you sound the return whistle for Bob Hopkin*

and Fred?"

Merritt pulled the cord connecting with the compressed air whistle and tugged it lustily. Then he paused and blew again, keeping this up for some time. No reply had come; but as yet they felt no anxiety. It was likely that the boys would take some time in returning, and the possibility of their being out of ear-shot of the whistle did not occur to any of the party.

But when an hour had passed and then another dragged its slow length away without bringing any signs of the absentees, anxiety gave place to alarm and alarm to genuine fear that harm might have overtaken them. They looked blankly at each other. For a time no one spoke.

Suddenly, from a great distance as it seemed, there came the sound of a rifle shot.

Had they but known it, the sound was caused by Tubby's shot at the band of monkeys. Although ignorant of its cause, it made the dismayed little party's spirits pick up a bit to hear at least

some sound of the two young hunters, even though they knew that they must be some distance off.

"Raynor," ordered Mr. Mainwaring, "I don't know whether that shot was merely a signal that they are coming, or a signal of distress. In any event I am going ashore. Rob, you may come with me if you like. Bring your rifle. Merritt, you keep guard with Mr. Raynor."

The engineer merely nodded in answer to his chief's orders. Merritt looked rather disappointed. He would have liked to accompany the searchers, but as he knew that was impossible he put the best face possible on the matter and helped Rob and Mr Mainwaring to get ashore by means of the plank.

Almost instantly the jungle swallowed them up. As they vanished from sight, Raynor sighed. Merritt looking up saw that he looked distressed. He ventured to ask him what was the matter.

"I don't just know why, my boy, but I've got an idea that the lads are in trouble in the woods

THE BOY SCOUTS yonder," he said. "I don't like the idea of that distant shot."

"You—you don't think that there are any Indians off in the forest, do you?" asked Merritt, turning a shade paler.

"I don't think anything. I don't want to say anything till I'm sure; but we're not so far from San Bias country that a wandering hunting party might not happen along through the forest. They have the jungle honeycombed with paths known only to themselves."

"But supposing—just supposing that the boys did fall in with them, would the Indians do them any harm?"

"Impossible to say, Merritt. This I do know, however, that the Indians' minds have been worked on by those who are opposed to the canal until they have been taught to regard all white men as their enemies. They have been told that the making of the canal will flood out their hunting grounds and drive them into remoter parts

of the country. Naturally, they regard white men with suspicion and hatred."

While this conversation was going on, Mr. Mainwaring, whose face was sadly troubled, and his young companion,

had been pushing their way through the jungle. Fortunately the trail of Tubby and Fred was pretty well marked where they had shoved their way through the underbrush. Finally they came to the spot where the two boys had met with the serpent. Rob examined the ground with the instinct of a true scout and skillful trapper. Traces of a sudden stoppage and a precipitate flight off into the jungle were plainly visible.

But what had caused the boys to beat such a rapid retreat was by no means so plain.

"Can you make out anything, Rob ?" asked Mr. Mainwaring, after a pause.

"No, sir," said Rob perplexedly, "except that something appears to have frightened them just at this point. You can see by their footmarks in this soft mud that they were running fast when

THE BOY SCOUTS they made off. And see here, sir, where one of them fell and scrambled up again, going on as quickly as before."

"Jove, you can read all that in those tracks?"

"That's part of the Boy Scout training, sir," rejoined Rob modestly.

"It's wonderful! Wonderful! But tell me, can you see the

signs of any wild beasts?"

"Not one. That's what makes it so mysterious. It is plain that something was after them and yet there are no tracks."

"Well, we had better follow up the train they have left through the jungle. That is our only course, in fact."

On and on they pursued the trail, going slowly of necessity. Here they would lose the trail for a time and then again in a few minutes Rob's cleverness as a Scout would pick it up again by means of a broken blade of grass or a creeper that had been brushed aside. Never had the young leader's well-trained faculties been more

on the alert than now as he followed his chum's trail through the trackless jungle.

And all the while poor Tubby and Fred were wandering further and further from them. At length they reached the open space where the boys had paused a while and Tubby had shot at the monkeys overhead. All at once Rob darted forward. On the ground he had spied a brass shell. They examined it and found that it tallied with the caliber of Tubby's rifle, but beyond this there was no further clue.

Suddenly Rob gave a cry of delight. He eagerly examined what appeared to Mr. Main-waring to be nothing more than a clump of pampas grass slightly bent over to the left. But

Rob's quick eye had caught sight of a band of grass tied round its top just below the bend. To an ordinary person's eye this would have meant nothing. But to Rob, trained in scouting, it meant that the two lads they were pursuing had turned to the left.

On they went again, never flagging through

the hot noonday, but patiently picking up the trail as they went along. Now a scratch on the bark of a limb would show Rob the direction, presently some trampled grass or flowers led him on, again he would stumble on one of Tubby's stone or grass signs.

All the time the trail kept getting fresher. Their hopes rose high.

"We're catching up on them," cried Rob. "It's slow but sure; we're catching up."

Presently they stood in the space under the tall trees where Tubby and Fred had paused and where the San Bias Indians had surprised them. Rob, like a pointer dog, went rapidly hither and thither, crouched low, looking for the tiny signs which mean so little to an untrained and so much to a carefully educated eye.

Suddenly he gave a sharp cry. It brought Mr. Mainwaring to his side in an instant.

"Look, sir! Here in this soft earth! The print of bare feet! Very small bare feet ! What does it mean?"

"Indians!" exclaimed Mr. Mainwaring, his face working. "The trail ends here, Rob. Oh, my poor boy ! My poor boy!"

And, quite overcome, Mr. Mainwaring sank down on the same log on which, had he but known it, his son Fred had collapsed but a short time before. It was a long time that he sat there with his head buried in his hands, and when he raised his face Rob saw that it was white and strangely drawn, but full of determination.

"What are we to do, sir?" demanded Rob. "I'm afraid that, as you say, there is no doubt they have been carried off; but luckily, I see no signs of a struggle. Perhaps there is hope."

Mr. Mainwaring had said nothing and Rob had not told him of his discovery of a spear that still stuck in the tree into which it had darted quivering above Tubby's head. He could not find it in his heart to increase Mr. Mainwaring's distress, and, agitated as he himself was, Rob had

still thoughtfulness enough not to add to another's burdens.

Presently he repeated his question.

"Have you any plan, sir ?"

Mr. Mainwaring sprang to his feet; his eyes had a hard glint

in them.

"Yes, I have a plan," he exclaimed, "the only plan that can save them. We must return at once, get a powerful force and ransack this forest from end to end. Perhaps if the Indians learn of this, and learn of it they will quick enough, they will give the boys up."

Slowly, each busied with his own thougnts, they made their way back toward the river. But before they reached it, it began to grow dusk. An uneasy wind sighed in the tops of the forest trees. But for this a death-like stillness prevailed.

"We must hurry. A storm is coming on," said Mr. Mainwaring looking upward.

Before long they could catch the glint of the river through the trees. But here a fresh sur-

prise awaited them. There lay the canoes, just as they had left them; everything looked the same, but of the launch there was not a sign!

They could hardly believe their eyes, but the fact remained that the Pathfinder had vanished; nor was there any trace of its two occupants. It was at this moment that Rob noticed that the river seemed to be flowing more swiftly and that its level had risen.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE RUINED CITY.

It would have been worse than useless for Tubby or Fred to have attempted flight, as the stout youth had rightly conjectured. Resistance would have been equally foolhardly. This would have been so in any case, but any move against the Indians was now rendered doubly dangerous by the fact that two of the odd-looking little natives had picked up the two rifles the boys had so foolishly forgotten and were examining them in a way that showed that they had knowledge enough of the white man's weapons to use them, should occasion offer.

After a vast deal of jabbering in their unknown tongue, two of the Indians bound Tubby's hands behind his back while the others stood guard to protect their companions against any sudden move. Then came Fred's turn. This

done, the boys were led across the open space to a clump of trees from amidst which the Indians had first appeared.

To Tubby's astonishment he saw that a narrow, but well beaten trail ran through the jungle from this point. But in what direction it led he was, of course, ignorant. He guessed, however, that it must be one of the secret Indian paths to which Mr. Raynor had referred. On either side of the narrow

trail the jungle grew up thick and impenetrable. Two Indians walked in front, then came the boys, behind marched the other Indians.

"W-w-w-w-what is going to become of us?" quavered Fred as they moved along at a swift though steady pace.

"I don't know. I guess we are bound for some village or other back in the San Bias country. It's a good sign though that they haven't offered us any violence."

Fred could not but agree that this was so. But little more talk was indulged in between the

two captives. It was not a situation that adapted itself to conversation. Hour after hour they trudged along through the tropical forest until at last they came upon something startling.

In front of them, as they rounded a curve in the crooked trail, there suddenly rose up something that seemed menacingly to dispute their further passage through the forest.

There, facing them, was a hideous monster carved out of a white stone or marble, they could not be sure which. The thing loomed ghastly white against a background of dark trees. Spots of rank moss grew on its glaring stone face. Its stumpy hands were folded and tucked up on its breast; its legs and feet, shaped like a water creature's, were drawn up

under its belly. But it was the awful face with its sinister glare that gave the boys a start that quivered through their frames. As if in proof of its antiquity the statue was broken in places and leaned slightly to one side. Through the cracks in the white stone, great, twisted, gnarled tree trunks, like serpents,

writhed in and out. Altogether it was as horrible an object to come upon in the depths of a great forest as the mind could conceive. Small wonder the boys shuddered at it. The Indians, however, did not appear to regard it with much awe.

"What an awful looking thing!" shuddered Fred, who had turned pale.

"Pshaw! It's only an old idol," Tubby scoffed, assuming a bold air for Fred's comfort. "Lots of 'em in this part of the world. Crackers! Fred, I shouldn't wonder but what we are coming to one of those ancient cities that have long been supposed to exist in this part of the world. I think — Great Caesar! Look there, will you ?"

A wilderness of ruins suddenly opened before them as they topped a small rise. Everywhere was a confusion of tumbled idols, pillars, blocks of stone, heavy walls, flights of steps, some whole, some tumbling with decay, others still upright. Roots, branches and curling vines writhed in and out of the scene of desolation like great snakes. Here and there trees shot up from the empty

walls of roofless palaces. Their restless shadows waved mournfully above the ruins. Further back stood a building that surmounted a sort of platform of white stone. It was reached by a flight of steps on one side. On the other the walls towered up steep and slippery. They would not have afforded foothold to a fly.

The Indians marched the boys up the steps leading to this dismal palace. From the top of the platform they could see over the ruined city in all directions. And off to one side was a sight that made Tubby's heart beat more quickly. He had caught the glint of a river, and on its banks he had seen three canoes drawn up. If only they could reach that stream they might still escape. But such a prospect appeared to be remote in the extreme.

They were marshaled into the chamber within the watts they had noticed from below. It was of massive but rude architecture and was roofless, but the walls sloped inward, making any idea of climbing them out of the question. From

cracks in the walls grew tropic plants and creepers. To the boys' surprise, once within this place, their hands were untied. But this in itself was a bad sign so far as hope of escape went. It meant that the Indians knew there was no hope of their captives getting away.

Two guards were set to watch them at the door, and then the others left. The guards took up their station at the door with their wicked-looking spears all ready for instant action. Tubby, with his ruling passion still strong—and as a matter of fact he was fearfully hungry and faint after their long march—eyed longingly some red fruit that grew on one of the shrubs clinging to the wall. He was about to pluck some when Fred drew him back.

"Don't touch those, Tubby, they're not good to eat," he exclaimed. "I recognize the leaf. It's just like a deadly nightshade leaf at home. I guess they are a giant variety of that poisonous plant."

"Phew! I'm glad I didn't touch'em. Would they kill you?"

"If you ate many. A few would only put you to sleep. They contain a drug called bella-donna which is a narcotic."

Just then one of the natives appeared with two earthenware bowls full of half raw meat. The boys were hungry or they could not have touched the stuff. As it was, they ate all they could, but left quite a quantity. As they ate their guards eyed them in an odd way. It looked as if they were hungry, too, and would have liked to eat.

The boys could see out through the door, and, after eating all they could, they amused themselves by looking over the ruined city. They could see smoke rising some distance off

among the trees, and guessed that the main camp of the Indians was there. Probably, they guessed— and in this they were right—the superstitious Indians did not like to camp among the ruins of the lost race, although they had no objection to jailing their prisoners there.

As it grew dusk, the sky clouded over. Thunder began to rumble in the distance and the wind moaned in a most melancholy way among the trees that overshadowed the ruins. Far off they could hear the Indians shouting and singing in a coarse, unmusical way. Seemingly they were celebrating the success of their chase and capture of the two white boys.

At any rate, they appeared to forget the two guards utterly. It grew dark and the men still sat there. They had lighted a small fire outside the ruined temple, or whatever it had been, and the glow of it revealed their still and silent figures to the boy captives. One of them took some kind of cake from his girdle presently and took a bite of it. Then he offered it to his companion who bit into it hungrily. It was plain that the two Indians were getting hungry.

Tubby was about to try to conciliate them by offering them what the boys had left in their bowls, when he had a sudden inspiration. He went to the wall and began picking some of the

berries Fred had told him not to touch. Fred, who had fallen into a fitful slumber, did not notice him, and Tubby

proceeded uninterruptedly with what he was about.

It was about a quarter of an hour later and the rumble of the approaching storm was growing nearer and nearer when Tubby arose and, picking up the two bowls, approached the guards. Instantly they sprang to their feet and presented their spear blades at him. But Tubby, by signs, explained that he and his companion had not been able to eat all their rations and wanted to give them the rest.

As Tubby's shrewd mind had guessed from what he had seen, the two guards were famished. They saw no harm in taking the meat from the prisoner who was kind enough to offer it. They grabbed the bowls and in a minute, as it appeared to the astonished fat boy, they had emptied them. Tubby regarded the two Indians admiringly. He had never seen edibles disposed of so swiftly.

When they had eaten, the guards became stern

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again. They motioned Tubby back to the interior of the ruinous structure. The stout boy obeyed and sank down on the floor apparently composing himself to sleep, but in reality he was watching the two guards with intent eyes. Suddenly he gave a grunt of satisfaction. The guards began to nod sleepily. One almost fell over. He recovered himself, but in an instant he was off to sleep again; as for his

companion, after an ineffectual effort to awaken his comrade, he too sank into a deep slumber, falling across the threshold of the place.

Instantly Tubby was all activity. Quickly he aroused Fred.

"Wake up! Quick! Don't ask questions. Follow me."

"Why? What?" began Fred sleepily.

"Not a word. WeVe got to move quick. I squeezed the juice of those berries you told me about into the remains of our supper. The guards ate it. They're fast asleep. It's up to

us to cut and run for those canoes on the river

bank."

Fred was alert in an instant. As he rose softly to his feet a vivid flash of lightning illumined his face. Tubby saw that it was set and determined as became a Black Wolf Scout. He gripped Fred's hand tightly.

"Whatever happens, keep your nerve," he enjoined.

Then, hand in hand and on tiptoe, the two boys crept toward the doorway. As they werfr stepping over one of the sleeping guards Tubby, by the glow of the fire, saw that a small bag that the fellow had had tied at his waist had burst as he fell headlong in his slumber, and that a lot of odd-looking

pebbles lay scattered about near it. Yielding to he knew not what impulse, he stooped and stuffed a handful of the rocks into the pocket of his Scout coat.

It was work to bring the lads' hearts into their mouths, this advance out upon the open platform with the firelight on them to betray their

every movement. Far off they could catch the glow of the Indians' campfire; but for all they knew other guards might be about and at any minute they expected to hear a spear or an arrow whiz by them. But nothing of the sort happened. They reached the river bank in safety.

The lightning was now flashing incessantly. By its gleam they saw the canoes, with their paddles alongside, lying as they had last seen them. Tubby advanced, and, catching hold of one, turned it over. The next instant he gave a terrified yell. As he had turned it, there had leaped from under it, where he had evidently been sleeping, an Indian armed with a spear.

Before he could cast it, Tubby ducked low and rushed in on the man like a young bullock. The little San Bias native went down in the mud with a splash. Tubby wrested the spear from him and sent it flying. As the Indian struggled to his feet Fred gave him a blow on the mouth that must have driven some of his teeth in, to judge by the sound.

"Quick!" ordered Tubby in a tense undertone, "into the water with those other canoes now."

"But we only want one."

"We don't want 'em to chase us, do we?" exclaimed the fat boy sharply. "Over with 'em I say."

Fred shoved the two dugouts off. In a jiffy the current caught them and they went sailing out of sight. At the same instant there came another flash of lightning. It showed the river, swollen and angry, racing furiously along.

"Can you handle a paddle, Fred?" asked Tubby.

"Yes; I had a canoe on the Hudson," was the reply.

"Well, this is going to beat any Hudson you ever saw. There's a storm in the mountains evidently, and the river is rising .very minute. It can't be helped, though. Take a paddle and shove off."

Luckily both boys knew something about canoes or the start of that dugout would like-

wise have been its finish. But they saved it by skillful, swift handling from a capsize. The next instant they were in it, being hurled off at a dizzy pace down the rushing current. Behind them came yells and savage shouts. Their escape had evidently been discovered, probably when a change of

guards was made.

"Whoop!" shouted Tubby back defiantly. "We're off on the Chagres Limited, you shirtless sons of iniquity; it'll take better men than you to catch us now!"

The cranky canoe rocked wildly, and then shot off into the darkness, hurtled along by the sweeping current of an unknown river.

THE BOY SCOUTS

CHAPTER XXVII. "BE PREPARED."

We must now go back to Mr. Raynor and Merritt whom we left in the launch, a prey to no very enviable thoughts. As the sound of Rob's and Mr. Mainwaring's footsteps died away in the forest, they fell to speculating on the fate of their young comrades. All at once Merritt turned to his companion with an exclamation.

"Isn't the river current flowing more swiftly?" he asked.

Mr. Raynor gazed over the side at the muddy stream.

"It surely is," he decided. "I shouldn't wonder but there's a storm back in the mountains."

As the stream flowed more swiftly and with greater volume Merritt looked with some anxiety at their anchor rope. It was

not a particularly thick one and the stream was tugging frantically

at the launch. Suddenly, without the slightest warning, there was a sharp snapping sound and the rope parted. Before they had time to exchange a word, the launch was a hundred yards down stream. It was almost impossible to turn her about or direct her course, but accident accomplished for them what they had not been able to do for themselves. The Pathfinder suddenly struck a sand bank, gave a giddy sort of yaw and swung round, heading bow on down the stream.

The next instant the current which was still rising caught her and shot her off down stream with her bow pointing in the right direction. Mr. Raynor grabbed the spokes of the steering wheel before the craft had a chance to smash into the bank and Merritt set the engine slowly going on reverse so as to check, as much as possible, the furious speed. He had grave doubts of the patched-up link holding, but he nursed it along as carefully as he could.

It was not till they had gone some distance

that either of them had a chance to speak, and then naturally their first words were about those they had left behind. What anxieties beset them may be imagined. Two of their number were lost; the pair that had set out to find them would return either with or without the castaways, but in any case to find the launch gone. That it was all as unavoidable as fate made

no difference to the seriousness of the situation.

The Pathfinder, handled with consummate skill by Mr. Raynor, reached the Gatun settlement that evening, and the news spread like wildfire that the boys were lost and that Mr. Mainwaring had been left, by force of circumstances, in the forest. Everyone there appreciated the gravity of the situation. The river was rising and it might be impossible to ascend it for a week, even if then.

From the vivid flashes of lightning visible in the far-off peaks it was clear that back in the wild Cordillera the storm was raging savagely. The water continued to rise. After supper Mr.

Raynor, in charge during Mr. Mainwaring's absence, wrote out a telegram to Lieut. Col. Goethals informing him of what had happened. Merritt, who was aching for something to do, volunteered to take it to the little telegraph office by the railroad track; f or the head official of the canal was in Colon inspecting the work there, having left the day before in his private car.

Mr. Raynor, perhaps seeing that Merritt would feel better with some employment to take his mind off his worry, readily consented. The Boy Scout set out at once. As he went he looked 6ack at the distant peaks several times. The lightning was playing a witches' dance above them, and he thought with a pang of those near and dear to him who might

be wandering at that very moment among them.

The operator at the Gatun station was a talkative chap and he chatted to Merritt while he waited for an open wire. He told him that he had had a busy evening and grumbled quizzically

THE BOY SCOUTS at his own good nature in trying to please other people.

"Why, only half an hour ago," he said, "a chap, a young American, I guess, was in here and borrowed two of my batteries. Said he was experimenting. Well, I knew him by sight and 1 let him have 'em. What's the result? I've had to charge two more and the line don't work as good."

Merritt only half listened to the voluble operator's relation of his troubles. But presently he looked up languidly as the operator said brusquely:

"Why, here's the chap coming back now. Well, if he's after any more batteries he don't get 'em."

A footfall sounded on the platform outside, the door opened and in came a man at sight of whom Merritt almost fell off his chair. It was the young man that he had seen in the barn with Jared and with whom the latter had driven to the station the night of the fire in Hampton.

Merritt was sitting back in a corner. For the sake of coolness, there was only one lamp in the place, a shaded one

above the operator's table. A pile of boxes stood close to Merritt and he slipped in behind them. He had reasons of his own for not wanting to be seen just then.

"No more batteries," began the operator truculently as the stranger came in. But the other laughed.

"It's not batteries this time," he said with a slightly foreign accent. "It's a telegram I want to send."

"Oh, that's different. There's one ahead of you, though."

"All right; there is no hurry. I'll write mine out now."

The man sat down and rapidly wrote on a sending blank. He handed it in. The operator looked at it a minute and then handed it back.

"Sorry; I can't take it."

"Why not? I can pay you."

The man drew out a roll of bills.

"That's not it. Your message is in cipher and we are not allowed to take such telegrams in the zone."

"Whose orders?"

"Lieut. Col. Goethals and the U. S. Government."

"Curse them both," ground out the strangef angrily. The operator jumped to his feet.

"See here, friend," he said, "I'm an American and I think Goethals is a mighty fine man, too. See the point? There's the door. Now get! I'm blamed sorry I lent you those batteries, but I'd rather you didn't return them than come back."

Without a word the man turned and half slunk out of the door. As he passed close by Merritt, the Boy Scout heard him mutter:

"Yes, and you and all Yankees will be sorrier yet before morning."

Merritt looked around. There was an open door behind him. Quick as a flash he slipped through it and the next moment was following

the man through a clump of bananas that grew on each side of the road. Dodging among the broad leaves Merritt kept his quarry in sight and stuck close to his heels. The man walked on and then suddenly turned aside from the main road that led back to the "gold-men's" quarters and headed down into a sort of wild gully running to the river.

With Merritt close on his heels and blessing-the shrubs that grew at the path-side, the man, quite unconscious that anyone was on his tracks, kept on. At length he came to a more or

less tumble-down hut not far from the river bank.

He paused here a minute and gave three low whistles. In response out came an old negro.

"Dis funny time ob night to call ?" said the old darky questioningly.

"This is a good time of night to call," said the man with a peculiar emphasis. To Merritt it sounded as if the words just spoken were a sort of countersign. At any rate nothing more was

said. The old negro admitted the stranger to

the hut and closed the door.

"Now what sort of work is on foot," muttered Merritt to himself. "What mischief are those rascals up to? It's all most mysterious. This fellow whom weVe seen with Jared first borrows electric batteries and then tries to send a cipher message. I can't make it out."

He stood a moment irresolute as to what course to pursue. Should he go back and tell Mr. Raynor what he had discovered? But the next minute he decided not to. After all he had no proof; he would try to peep into the hut and see what was going on. Cautiously he re-connoitered, completely circling the hut. But not a gleam of light was visible.

Bit by bit he crept closer, using the utmost caution. At length he got close to the rear wall and here, to his huge delight, he found a crack through which he could peer at what was going on within. What he saw made his heart leap. Round a table were seated Estrada, Alverado, the

strange man and Jared Applegate. Jared's face was white and frightened but the others wore a sort of deadly composure. In the background stood the old darky who had opened the door. On the table was a smoky kerosene lamp.

But on the table also were some objects that puzzled Merritt. There was a brass lever, not unlike a telegraph key, and by it an array of batteries with wires leading from them. The strange man was seated near the brass key, with which he was toying carelessly, and yet with a certain caution.

"Be careful/' Alverado was warning him, "don't be premature, my dear Castro; in your eagerness you have already broken two batteries."

"Yes, but the accommodating station agent replaced them. Ha! ha! if he had known what they were for! But he wouldn't handle cipher, confound him!"

"That was the order of these hated Yankees. Bnt after to-night we shall triumph over them.

One touch of that key in the right direction

and "

Estrada, who was speaking, spread his hands expressively. The others' eyes blazed; only Jared cowered and looked badly frightened.

"Why can't you put it off till I get out of the country?" he begged.

"So we would have, because of the service you did us in showing us where to place the—the little matter you know of. But you have been well rewarded. Why repine? As for putting it off, what time like the present? Mainwaring is away and those cursed little rats of spies, Boy Scouts, as you call them, are with him. We are safe."

But Jared only cowered and quivered the more. As for Alverado, who had uttered the words just recorded, he lit a fresh cigarette and regarded the whining youth with scorn.

Merritt's blood almost froze as he looked on at this strange scene. He had a quick mind, and from almost the first he had guessed what that paraphernalia on the table meant, what the

"patriots," as they doubtless called themselves, were waiting for. But the Boy Scout did not wait. He ran, as if on wings, from that hut in the hollow, his pulses beating like snare drums and a fearful doubt assailing his mind.

"Would he be too late?" That was the fear that pounded at

Merritt's brain as he raced along for the "gold-men's" row of houses. At the summit of the little hill, leading up from the hollow of the hut, he stumbled over something, something that entangled his foot. He leaned to examine it and then gave an astonished cry. The next moment he had whipped out his scout knife and cut his foot loose of the encumbrance. After that for some reason he went more slowly, taut still he ran, ran to summon aid for Uncle Sam against a gang of foul plotters.

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Half an hour later the scene in the hut was not much changed, but a tense silence had fallen over its inmates. On every face was a strained, anxious look, yet underlaid by an expression of

exultation. Jared alone was missing. In an agony of fear and remorse he had broken from the hut a short time before. They had not tried to check him.

"Ready ?" said Estrada, who held a watch. He was deadly pale.

The strange young man by the table shoved back a stray lock of black hair with long, thin fingers. One hand trembled on that brass key that Merritt had noticed.

"Let the invader! the usurper! the tyrant take warning from to-

night!" cried Alverado solemnly in a declamatory tone.

Suddenly there came a crash outside. The door was carried inward off its hinges. A crowd of men, in the uniform of the Gatun police, burst into the room.

"Seize that man!" cried Mr. Raynor, who was in the lead. He pointed to the strange young man whose fingers were already pressing the key downward.

"Betrayed!" shrieked Alverado as a revolver was knocked upward out of his hand.

The police, taking no chances after this, sprang forward toward the man at the key with leveled weapons.

"Surrender!" they called out.

"Not till I've blown Uncle Sam's work to Kingdom Come!" cried the wretch with a hideous laugh.

His fingers pressed the key. But no earth-shaking explosion followed. The tons of dynamite that had been cunningly concealed in a spillway half a mile off did not explode. The Gatun Dam was not hoisted skyward and the work of years ruined.

There was only a feeble "click," echoed by two more as the handcuffs were snapped on Alverado and Estrada.

Mr. Raynor fairly embraced Merritt and the rest crowded round him.

"If it hadn't been for you, my boy, and your presence of mind in guessing what that wire was

you stumbled across and cutting it, the dam might

I have been blown up in accordance with this

wretch's desires," he declared, and then, as the miscreant, who had in vain tried to send the fatal spark to the dynamite, was made a prisoner, Mr. Raynor raised his voice:

"Three cheers for the Boy Scouts!" he cried, "and in particular for Merritt Crawford of the Eagles. Had it not been for his quick wits in guessing that a plot was on foot when he saw that wretch yonder at the Gatun station, this might have been a black night for Uncle Sam and the Panama Canal."

The cheers were given with right good will. Soon afterward the prisoners, including the old black man, were marched off to the lock-up maintained at Gatun for offenders on the canal work, although, it is safe to say, it never before housed such monsters as the would-be dynamiters of the Gatun Dam.

"If only the rest were here and safe," said Merritt to Mr. Raynor late that night, "I should

be perfectly happy. As it is I don't feel as if I could rest till we are reunited."

It was the next day that the entire community, already wild with excitement over the discovery of the plot against the dam and the capture of the chief conspirators, was treated to a fresh thrill. Down the river, which had somewhat subsided, came two canoes. In the first one were Rob and Mr. Mainwaring. In the second sat Tubby and Fred. How they had met is soon explained.

As Tubby had guessed, the river they had seen from the ruins was the Chepalta. Its swift current had carried them into the Chagres itself and in course of time they came to the spot where Mr. Mainwaring and Fred, sadly distressed and worried over the loss of the launch, had decided to spend the night. They had built a roaring fire to keep off serpents or wild beasts, and Tubby and Fred, as soon as they saw the blaze, had made for it. In a few seconds a joyful reunion

had taken place. As more sleep that night was out of the question, they had waited till the first flush of dawn and then emptied one of the provision canoes. In this Mr. Mainwaring and Rob seated themselves and they all paddled back to civilization.

Their amazement when they heard of what had been taking place at Gatun during their absence may be, to use a phrase hackneyed but apt, "better imagined than described." There

is no space here to relate all that followed or to give the details of the trial and sentencing of the rascally plotters. It was found, for they confessed in hope of immunity, that the plot was far more widely organized than had been thought. Dozens of laborers were implicated before the end, and it was the number engaged that had made it possible for them to elude the vigilance of the Gatun Guards, secrete so much dynamite and then connect it with wires to the lonely hut in the hollow. As for the strange young man, it was found that he had been a chemist specializ-

ing on explosives, who had thought to avenge his country's fancied wrongs by enlisting with the plotters.

Had it not been for Merritt, who received the personal congratulations of Col. Goethals and the Commission, there is little doubt but that the great dam might have been damaged almost beyond hope of reconstruction. The boy bore his honors modestly, as became a true Scout, and of course the story did not get to the newspapers, so that he was spared the embarrassment of being interviewed and lionized. His comrades felt for him nothing but pride and admiration.

Those pebbles that Tubby picked up proved to be raw emeralds of great value and you may be sure that each of his friends was presented with one. The chums of Lucy Mainwaring, too, have noticed that she now wears a brooch set with a magnificent emerald, by which she seems to set great store. Who gave it to her we will leave our readers to

guess.

Jared Applegate managed in some way to

evade the drag-net set for him, and has not been seen or heard of since the night he slipped out of the hut overcome at the last minute by the thought of the terrible crime he had committed.

I should like to linger with you in this fascinating old land with its new interests and tell you how the ruined city in which Tubby and Fred passed such an uncomfortable time was explored and rare treasures of antiquity found. I should also like to relate more of the adventures that befell the chums among the "Gold-men" of the Isthmus, but I must content myself with what has been written and my readers with the prophecy that the future will be able to recall no more noble achievement than this that has been the subject of our tale.

You are assured, however, that the Boy Scouts returned to their studies and to the States better citizens, better patriots and better Scouts for the exciting times they spent on Uncle Sam's big ditch—the eighth wonder, and the greatest of the

world. Let every American boy, who gets a chance, see it. It will strengthen and cement his love for the Stars and Stripes and for the U. S. A., the country that put the gigantic enterprise through in spite of almost overwhelming

difficulties.

And now the time has come to say good-bye to the Boy Scouts. So wishing them well in everything they undertake and hoping that they may ever be "good scouts and true," the author bids a reluctant adieu to them and to the readers who have followed the "Eagles" through their many adventures.

END

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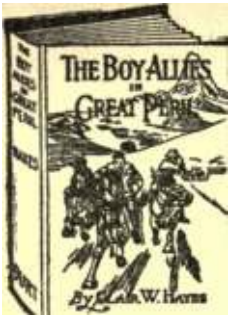

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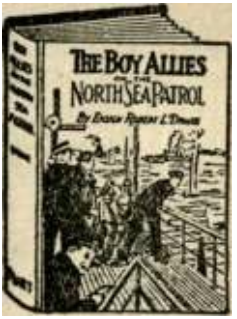

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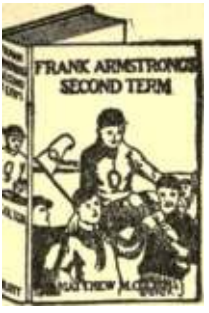

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